

SHUNNED
BY THE
SCHOOL





THE JOHN NEILSON INSTITUTION

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FOR EXCELLENCE IN

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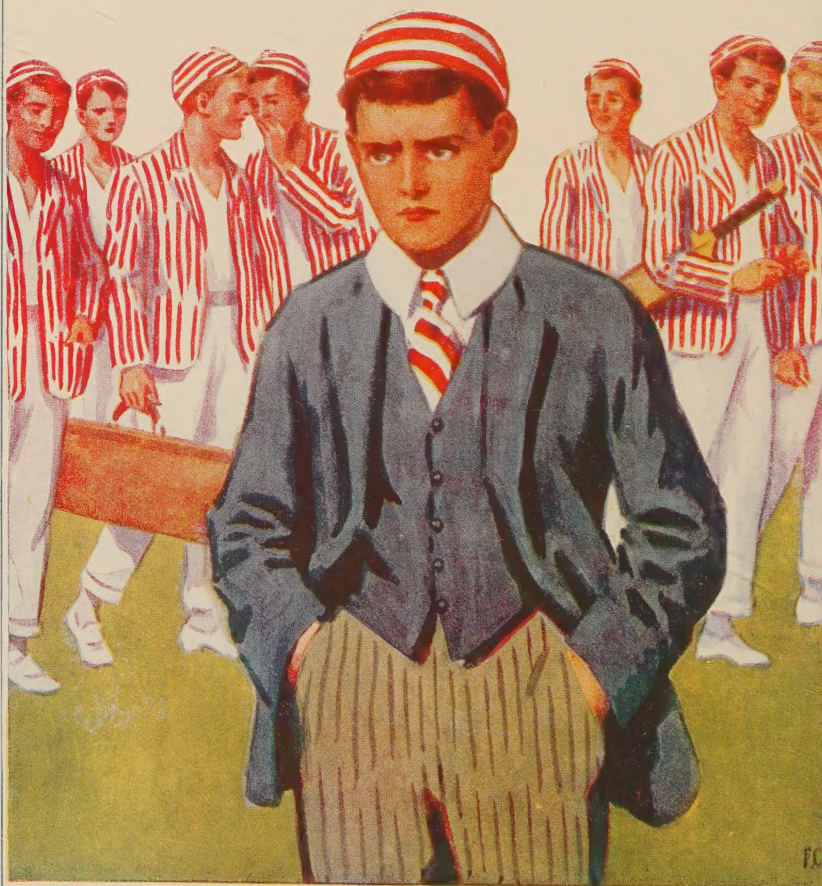
SESSION 1936-1937

L. N. GOW, M.A., B.Sc., RECTOR.

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HE STOOD SILENT AND ALONE, SHUNNED BY THE REST OF THE SCHOOL.

S.S.

(See page 112)

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HOW O'MARA MADE GOOD

BY

WILLIAM WALLACE



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CHAPTER I.

HARRY O'MARA—MILKSOP.

“**D**EAR OLD TRUEMAN,—I suppose you will be surprised at my breaking the silence of the long years, but, as you know, I never was a great hand at writing letters, and our friendship was ever too great a thing to be broken by the mere absence of regular communication. Yes, I am back in England once more, after twelve years serving the Empire abroad, and I return to find that I need the help of a friend like yourself. No, not for myself, old fellow. Thank heaven my affairs have prospered, and for myself I need the help of no man. It is for my son. Perhaps you remember Harry as an infant. You were always his particular

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favourite in the days long gone by, and had great hope of the boy. So, too, had I, and I return to find that my fond dreams are like to prove no more than dreams.

“ When I was ordered abroad I left my motherless boy in the care of a maternal aunt. I never made a greater mistake in my life. She loved him too well ; he has been her idol. From the first she petted him and pampered him, giving way to his every whim, denying him nothing, ever interposing herself as a shield to guard him from the kicks that every boy must take if he is to become a man. I left behind me a boy full of life and promise, and return to meet my greatest disappointment.

“ At the moment Harry is hopeless—selfish and inconsiderate, petulant and spoiled. Mentally he is bright, and possessed of a book-learning beyond anything I had at his age. Physically, too, he lacks little save training. The frame and the flesh are there ; yet he is a milksop. He knows no games such as should be the delight of boys. Football he considers too rough, and cricket to him is dangerous. Croquet is his pet outdoor amusement, and he’s an absolute whale at chess.

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There is in him none of the spirit of the O'Maras, and, unless he is changed, I fear the day when he will be sent out to face the world.

"I appeal to you to help in the work of his regeneration. It is time he entered a public school, and I am sending him down to my old school, Whitegate, where you can keep an eye on him and turn him into a man. I have tried in the short days I have been home ; but an Indian liver does not give me that patience that is needed in the work. I am writing to the Head, and want you to use your influence to see that the boy is admitted. What is more, I am taking it for granted that you will do this for me, and am arranging to send Harry down for the opening of the next term. Some day I will run down and have a talk over old times. At present I am too busy putting my affairs in order after my return home. Sincerely your old friend,

"H. O'MARA (*Colonel*)."

Colonel O'Mara sealed the letter ready for post, and rang the bell.

"Please tell Master Harry I want him," he said to the maid.

Two minutes later a bright-faced boy

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entered the room. He was a fine figure of a youth, yet there was something wrong about him. Yes, that was it—he was too perfect for his age. Not a hair was out of place ; collar and cuffs were immaculate in their whiteness, his tie was a marvel of perfection, and not a smear marred the white expanse of his hands. Doting and misguided mothers might have found the picture pleasing, and one could imagine the boy being held up as the model for the district by mothers harrassed by more human offspring. He was not a boy, he was a hot-house plant, and the colonel sighed as he looked on the picture.

“ You sent for me, sir ? ”

“ Yes, Harry. I have been thinking matters over, and have decided that it is time you went to a public school. At your age private tutors will no longer suffice.”

“ I suppose I must go if you say so, sir ; but I can learn quite as much, perhaps more, as I am.”

“ Book-learning, yes. I have to admit that. But there is something beyond book-learning that one gets at a public school. Something that comes from the games—football, cricket, boxing.”

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“ Oh, I loathe them, dad ; they are so rough, you know.”

The colonel sighed afresh at the words, and it was with difficulty that he checked an outburst.

“ I would be more pleased, Harry, to see you scoring a try or stopping a hot shot through the slips than wasting your time as you do over such things as chess and the like.”

“ Wasting my time, sir ? Why, Mr. Phelps says chess is the finest game for developing the mental faculties that was ever invented. I am sure I would rather continue as I am at present than go to some horrid school, where all the boys will be rough and untidy. At present, too, I am working out some very pretty problems, and Mr. Phelps has promised to teach me some of the work of the old masters.”

“ Old masters ! Ye gods ! Did anyone every hear a boy talk so ? It's new masters you need, Harry, and I have decided that you shall have them.”

“ Very good, sir. If you say I must go to this horrid public school, I suppose I must go. If there is nothing else, I would like your permission to return to my study.”

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“Study on a glorious day like this? Why not go for a scamper on the heath on Betty?”

“Well, sir, I am working out a variation of the Queen’s Gambit, and I find it very fascinating.”

The boy turned and left the room, closing the door behind him very carefully, and without the least noise.

“Queen’s Gambit!” spluttered the colonel when he found himself alone. “Some new-fangled idea in chess, I suppose. It strikes me very forcibly that I did not come home a minute too soon for the boy. Another few years, and he would have been ruined.”

He turned to the sideboard and fondled a collection of cups that were a tribute to his own athletic skill as a boy.

“Chess, chess, chess. And I would give anything to see the boy taking a delight in lifting a pot like that.”

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CHAPTER II.

DEFYING AUTHORITY.

“ Well, Adam, I suppose we had better have the new chaps up, and have a look at them. By the way, I have a note from True-man, asking me to keep an eye on a new fellow named O'Mara. Ah, here it is : ‘ Harry O'Mara, son of Colonel O'Mara, V.C. I want you to keep a special eye on this boy for a few weeks, and let me know what you think of him. He may be a bit difficult at first ’—sounds promising, that ; there is a hint of a dry nurse being needed—‘ the boy has had the misfortune to have been brought up by a maiden aunt and private tutors, and I want you to smooth the corners for him a little until he gets into the way of school life.’ ”

“ Edward Raikes, dry nurse ; school children carefully looked after,” laughed Scott.

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"You'll have to hang your sign out, Teddy, if this sort of thing goes on. What are you going to do about it?"

"Oh, I suppose I'll have to keep an eye on the kid, and if, as Trueman hints, he's a spoiled darling, he'll need a helping hand before very long. You might tell Wallace to pass the word along for the kids to come up and see me."

Scott rose lazily from his seat to carry out his captain's order. It was a rule at Whitegate that all new boys should interview the captain as soon as they got to the school, and the proceeding did a great deal of good. It served to make the boys feel more at home, and at the same time they realised something of the importance of office. Raikes, who was captain, took himself very seriously.

To him Whitegate was a sacred institution, and he believed that he was directly responsible for its success. Actually he had little less power than a master. He could cane for offences that he deemed merited such punishment, or impose lines for minor misdeeds. With the senior prefects, he was responsible for the keeping of discipline outside the school buildings, and he kept it.

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One by one the new boys passed into the room, were introduced to Raikes, and dismissed with a cheery word and a smile. Raikes ticked off their names as they went until there was left only one.

"Give Wallace a call," he said to Scott. "One of the kids is missing."

The senior prefect grumbled at being disturbed.

"What's the trouble now?" he asked. "Can't a fellow put his room straight without being called so many times?"

"All right, don't get excited about it; only one of the new boys is missing—O'Mara. Did you warn him?"

"O'Mara? Yes; he's in Miggles' study, and if I know anything, there are a pair of owls together. You know how Miggles swots. When I got to the study there he was hard at work, and the new kid was working out some problem in chess. Quite wrapped up in it, too. He was actually annoyed when I interrupted him to tell him you wanted him."

"Annoyed, was he! We'll see about that. What did he say?"

"Something about coming along when he had finished the problem. I told him

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he'd jolly well better get a move on at once. Told him there would be ructions if he did not and he said something about pleasing himself, and that he was not going to be bullied by any boys in the school. Sat on his dignity."

"My eye, Raikes, that sounds lively for a start. I wonder what sort of a cherub he is? Go along and fetch him, Wallace, and don't be too violent. Bring him along, though."

"Oh, I'll bring him along all right. I just want an excuse to make him understand his place in the scheme of things here."

"Go easy," cautioned Raikes. "True-man is interested in the kid. According to him the infant has had a queer bringing up, and has no idea of what school life is. We've got to break him in gently."

Wallace whistled in a surprised tone as he departed on his errand.

It was a flushed and very indignant O'Mara that was ushered in some minutes later. The state of his tie bore evidence to the fact that his coming had not been entirely voluntary. Wallace grinned, winked, and departed.

"Oh, there you are, sonny. Pleased to welcome you to Whitegate."

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O'Mara carefully ignored the extended hand of the captain, and a shadow of annoyance passed over that worthy's face.

"How is it you did not come when I first sent for you?" he asked.

"You are not a master, are you?"

"No, I am not; but I am captain of this school, and it's usual for fellows to come when I send for them."

"Is it, indeed? Well, I'm in the habit of having people come when I send for them, and I'm not at the beck and call of any Tom, Dick, or Harry here. If anyone wants me he can jolly well come and see me, and not send impudent messages."

"My sainted aunt!" gasped Scott, as he hurriedly turned his head to hide a smile. Raikes' brow clouded over like thunder, but he remembered Trueman's letter just in time to check what would have appealed to O'Mara as a minor edition of a cyclone.

"I suppose you are not used to the ways of a public school yet, or you would know that juniors have not to think twice when the captain sends for them. I don't send unless it's necessary. It is one of my duties to interview all new boys, and when I send for

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you again, please see that I am not kept waiting."

"I don't recognise your right to send for me. You are not a master, and I have a perfect right to do what I like with my own time when I'm not engaged on lessons."

"Oh, that's the way the cat jumps, is it? Well, sonny, you can forget all about that. Within limits you can do whatever you jolly well want to out of the classroom; but suppose every fellow here did the same, what would become of the school? Why, the place would be a howling wilderness in less than no time. No, sonny, get that idea out of your head at once. Here the school is first, and you are second, and you have to do something in the interests of the school, even though you may not like it. I am making due allowance for your ignorance, but you had better get off your perch as quickly as you can. If you don't there is trouble ahead. I don't want to start by caning a new boy on his first day here, and so will overlook your cheek. You can toddle along now."

"Oh, indeed! I will toddle along, as you put it, and I will go straight to the Head and report your threats."

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With this, as a parting shot, O'Mara left the room, leaving two almost speechless individuals behind him.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" Raikes managed to say at last. "What do you make of the kid, Scott? He is in for a jolly lively time here if that is the attitude he is going to take up. Report me to the Head, indeed. I hope he does. He'll get the shock of his little life. Why, old Wallingford would whale him for it."

"I'm not worrying about him overmuch. He'll soon get a lot of that nonsense knocked out of him here, though I must say he appeals to me as a queer specimen. Used to having people wait on him, is he! I don't envy you your job trying to keep him out of trouble with those Shell kids. He'll run into it at every turn if he uses the same amount of cheek as he did here. But let's forget him. Did you get any further with the question of having games made compulsory?"

"No. Trueman had another go at Wallingford, but he could not move the Head, who has a peculiar notion as to one volunteer being worth two pressed men."

"He's right up to a point, but he'd find

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himself in a mess if he applied it to lessons, wouldn't he ? ”

“ He is wrong. Why, some of the keenest fellows I know were forced to take up games at first.”

“ Well, it puts you in the cart for the summer. If the fellows can please themselves, how are you going to run the cricket ? ”

“ True, O dismal one ; but be not down-hearted. Better that the team should lose every game than a single fellow shall be made to do something he does not fancy instead of toddling off to the tuck-shop and stuffing himself with things that ruin his digestion and his wind. There it is, though, and until the head changes his mind such slackers as Morden, the best medium-paced bowler in the school, and Biggar, who would live to bat for his county if he'd only take the trouble to practise a bit at the nets, can loaf about and see other fellows trying to keep up the honour of the school.”

“ Those outsiders ! Why, they are never fit, they are always loafing about, setting a bad example to the school. You know where Burwell's house stands, and it's all through those two.”

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"I do, and, by Jove! that new kid, O'Mara, goes into the house."

"And you are asked to keep an eye on him. I don't envy you your job, as I said before."

"I'm not exactly regarding it as a bed of roses, when I remember the influence the kid will be under. Oh, come on. Let's forget the worries of this life and go and see if Parsons is back yet."

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CHAPTER III.

A BRUSH WITH A PREFECT.

O'Mara was positively fuming with rage when he left the captain's room. Here was pretty treatment, to be sent for as though he were an ordinary boy, and then lugged out by force when he insisted on his rights. It was an entirely new experience for him, and he objected. Hitherto, he had been able to command the whole of the servants at his aunt's house, and he was not going to be treated in that way by anyone. For the moment he hesitated as to whether he should go and complain to the Head, but the lure of the problem he was working on was too strong, and he decided to put off the visit until he had more time to attend to it. At least, he had put *that boy* in his place, and, after what he had said, he told himself the

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position was so clear that he would not be annoyed again by calls he did not mean to answer. He felt aggrieved, but told himself that throughout the interview he had carried himself as a gentleman should.

“ Hey, there, you new kid ! ”

The words broke upon his dream as he walked along the passage. There was no other boy in sight, and he judged they were addressed to him ; but such was his humour he decided to ignore them. Instead of taking any notice, he lifted his head into the air and walked on.

“ Hey, there, you new kid, I want you.” The tones were insistent ; but they had no more effect than had the first call.

O'Mara walked on wilfully unconscious until he got a shock. A rough hand suddenly seized him by the collar for the second time that day, and he felt himself twisted round and an angry face was thrust into his own. For a moment he was tempted to hit it ; but the thought that no gentleman would indulge in a common brawl restrained him.

“ Didn't you hear me when I called ? ” asked the stranger.

“ I did ; but I have yet to learn that you

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have any right to call in that insolent way to any boy who happens to be passing ; and, at least, I can assure you that I shall not take any notice when you do, so you can save yourself the trouble of shouting again when I am about."

" You what ? You cheeky young bounder. Do you know who I am ? "

" No ; I am pleased to say that, so far, I have been denied the annoyance of knowing you."

" Well, I'll let you know that I am Biggar, and that I am prefect in Burwell's house. You are in that house, aren't you ? "

" I am ; but that does not give you the right to call me in that rude way."

" Does not give—— My eye ! You *are* asking for trouble, youngster, if ever a boy was. No matter what you think, you can take it from me that when I choose to call you, you had better come at the run. I want you to go to the tuck-shop over there and bring me some things. Here's a list, and you had better get a move on."

O'Mara made not the least attempt to take the list held under his nose. Whatever his father may have thought about his general

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conduct and avoidance of "rough" games, there was some of the V.C. strain in the boy. Here he was convinced that he was in the right in refusing to go the errand, and that being so, wild horses would not have driven him to move a yard on the way.

"You can go yourself," he said, shortly.

"Do you mean to say you refuse to go?"

"Most certainly I refuse. I am not here to be ordered about by every bully who comes along. If you want the things, you can bring them."

The next moment his cheek smarted, as the result of a savage blow, and he was twisted round once more. This time his arm was held, and it hurt. Biggar knew that, but he increased the strain.

"Won't go, won't you? We'll see how you like this, then," and he gave the captured arm another twist. His grip was shrewd, and after one frantic effort to escape, O'Mara remained still. The arm hurt awfully, but that was no matter. He was forced to do something he did not mean to do, and he would die first. He shut his teeth with a snap, and not a sound escaped him, though he felt that he must faint unless that awful

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twisting stopped. What would have been the end it is impossible to say, but just at that moment Raikes and Scott came into sight. They took the position in at a glance.

"There's that outsider Biggar bullying a new boy," said Scott, breaking into a run. In a flash Biggar felt himself seized and the boot of the indignant Adam helped him down the corridor.

"Bullying again. I said I would kick you when I caught you at it again, and I am going to kick you all the way back to your study!"

He was as good as his word. Biggar was as clay in his hands, and he was flung into his study, there to rub a tender portion of his anatomy and reflect on the error of his ways.

"Now what's the matter?" O'Mara reeled as Biggar's hold was broken, and Raikes caught him as he would have fallen. His arm felt very numb and useless as he allowed it to fall, lifeless, by his side, and he went white as a fresh spasm of pain racked the tortured elbow joint.

"Nothing, only Biggar—I think that's his name—was trying to force me to go to the tuck-shop for some things for him."

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“ And you refused ? ”

“ Certainly. I did not come here to run errands for other boys, and I am not going to do it.” There was an air of determination about the boy.

“ Well, as it so happens, you were in the right, sonny. Biggar should have sent his fag ; and then you are too old for fagging. I’ll have a talk with Master Biggar. Arm painful ? ”

“ It is rather ; but no one could ever make me do something I did not want to do by twisting my arm. If it had not been so ungentlemanly as to indulge in a fight, I would have hit him on the nose as soon as he caught hold of me.”

“ You have queer ideas, sonny ; but I like the spirit that tempted you to hit him on the nose. Most of the fellows in the school would hesitate, for Biggar is about the best boxer we have, and I don’t advise you to try any experiments in that line until you have learned to use your hands. I suppose you know nothing about boxing ? ”

“ Oh, dear, no. It’s only the rough boys who do things like that, and my aunt always told me it was not gentlemanly to box.”

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"Well, until you know a bit about it I advise you to go slow. The boys here are apt to hit straight and hard, and you would get a hammering if you tackled a fellow like Biggar."

"Perhaps I would, if I so far forgot myself as to strike him; but, for all that, I am not going to let him bully me as he likes. I have a rooted objection to being ordered to run errands."

Nursing his elbow, O'Mara turned into his study, and Raikes waited for Scott.

"I gave Biggar a rare dressing-down when I got him in his study," Scott reported. "I told him that it had got to stop, and that if we caught him bullying new boys again we'd interview him with a cricket stump. By the way, what do you think of the new kid?"

"Queer little fish. Told me he would hit Biggar on the nose if it had not been ungentlemanly. He's got funny ideas, too, and talks like a book about his dignity."

"Oh, I don't mean that. Did you see the expression on his face as Biggar twisted his arm? He's got grit, that kid. I firmly believe he would have let Biggar half-kill him without a whimper. Most of the kids would

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have been yelling blue murder if their arms had been twisted like that."

"Yes; he's got the right kind of spirit hidden away somewhere, but it is going to take careful handling to bring it out."

The two chums continued their talk as they walked away arm-in-arm.

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CHAPTER IV.

INITIATED.

Away in the Fourth Form Dormitory most of the old boys had finished their unpacking, and were at a dead end. Clay was bemoaning the lack of anything to do, and wakening a sympathetic chord in the hearts of all the others.

“ I know ; let’s go and rag the Owl.” Sturgess Minor made the suggestion, and it was seized upon with glee. Miggles—he was the Owl—was the butt of the form. Studious to an abnormal degree, he had the merit of being very even-tempered and always entering into the spirit of any rags, even though he was the victim. The dormitory emptied itself in record time, and a torrent of juniors flowed to Miggle’s study. O’Mara had just resumed his problem on the chess-board as the human stream swept into the

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room, and in a moment he was the centre of a tangled mass of humanity. Chess-board and dignity were flung aside, and, for a time, there was nothing but the grunts of the struggling boys to be heard.

"I say, mind those tubes; they're full of poison, you know." Miggles introduced such a note of real anxiety into his voice that there was not a boy who did not believe him.

"Poison!" The word brought a halt, and they allowed Miggles to rise to his feet. He seized a test-tube, one he had filled with water not five minutes before, and held it tenderly.

"Woorali," he said in a whisper, as he uncorked it. "It's the most deadly poison known. Made by the natives of Central Africa, and no one knows the secret; but it's so strong that if I dipped this pen in it"—he suited his action to his words and flourished the wet pen before him—"and so much as scratched one of you fellows, he would be a dead man inside five seconds. Oh, it's horrible stuff! There is enough in that bottle to kill the whole town, or two towns this size."

He moved forward, and with the pen

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held towards the invaders who crowded in the doorway, shouted :

“ Begone, before I bring woe and mourning into your families. Begone, I say ! ”

“ Yes, get out.” O’Mara made his first contribution to the discussion. “ I don’t know what you boys are thinking about, dashing into private studies in this unseemly way, and I’ll jolly well report your conduct to the Head first thing in the morning.”

“ You’ll what ! ” Clay gasped at the enormity of the “ crime ” the new boy talked of committing. “ You’ll report us to the Head ? ”

“ Yes ; I am not going to submit to such an outrage calmly.”

“ Hear that, you chaps ? This new kid says he’ll report us to old Wallingford. Let’s initiate him.”

The idea was taken up at once. There was no hesitation about the Fourth when they decided on anything, and before O’Mara knew what was happening he was seized by many arms, carried into the Fourth Form common room, and dumped near the empty grate. Initiation was a joke, and the boys who wisely took it as such were let off lightly and enjoyed

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themselves. Just before he was dumped down, O'Mara did manage to get one leg free and he planted a well-judged kick in Clay's middle that sent that worthy gasping to the floor.

"Look out, boys, he's a kicker!" shouted Wiffins, and it did not soothe O'Mara's feelings when the junior rubbed his head and made a hissing noise through his teeth, and ordered him to "Woa, 'oss! Steady, Dobbins."

"I'll woa you, you little wretch, when I get free," cried the victim, moved out of his customary dignity by the stress of the moment. "Oh, you cowards, I'll report every one of you, I'll——"

The rest of the threat was smothered in a handkerchief. Initiation at Whitegate was a hilarious ceremony.

"It is proposed that O'Mara, the kicker, be admitted to the community of the Fourth. All those in favour say 'Aye.'"

There was a dead silence.

"All those against say 'No.' " A chorus of "noes" rang out.

"The noes have it, worthy master," yelled Clay.

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"The nose it is," replied Mason, who, while the talking had been going on, had secured a liberal supply of soot from the chimney.

"O'Mara is a little lamb," sang the company, as Mason proceeded to decorate the victim's nose with soot.

"He is admitted," called Clay. "How long shall he be held in slavery to the form?"

"Years," came the call, in accord with the formula.

"The years have it, worthy master."

"The years it is," and O'Mara winced as he felt the grime rubbed into all the crevices of his well-kept ears.

"Is he worthy?"

"Aye."

"The ayes have it," and, a minute later, black rings of soot encircled the victim's eyes. And so the merry game went on. The normal stage had long been passed, but there was no mercy for the grim O'Mara. He had to go through the whole of the absurd ritual and, in the end, was turned loose with a face that would not have disgraced a clown's, waistcoat and jacket turned inside out and collar fastened back to front, so that the hitherto immaculate

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tie hung down the centre of the boy's back. He made a pitiful effort to appear dignified, as he turned towards his study, and his tormentors rejoiced the more. Seething with rage, O'Mara did not see where he was going, and the first thing he knew was that he had bumped into Mr. Trueman.

"Good gracious, boy! What is the meaning of this foolery? What have you been doing?" Not that the master had any need to ask; he knew precisely what had happened.

"I have been brutally assaulted, sir, and treated in this disgraceful way by a pack of low ruffians. I shall enter a very strong protest against their conduct with the Head-master."

"Go to the bathroom, boy, and get rid of that mess. I will go into the matter in the morning," said the master, feeling that he would like to shake O'Mara.

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CHAPTER V.

SENT TO COVENTRY.

“ Boys of the Fourth Form will assemble in No. 2 Classroom after prayers. By order,—
E. TRUEMAN, *Master*.”

“ Hello, what’s in the wind now ? ” Clay addressed the question to no one in particular, but to the crowd of boys who had gathered round the notice board.

“ Dunno,” grunted Sturgess Major. “ I suppose he’s got another idea into his head that we need a lecture on our duty to the school. He has these fits every now and then. A lecture on duty seems to be his way of letting off steam.”

“ Can’t be that. We had the lecture at the beginning of last term. Must have another bee in his bonnet. I expect Raikes has been

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having another try to get him to have games made compulsory. He's wasting his time, so far as the Fourth is concerned, though some of the Sixth would do with a little ginger. I wonder——”

“ I say, you fellows, have you heard the news ? ” Biggar Minor broke on the group at a run, and in a state of tremendous excitement.

“ News ? What news ? ”

“ Burglars ! Thieves ! There's a gang of them.”

“ Burglars ? Where ? ”

“ Here. They broke into the school last night and stole all the Head's valuables. He's simply raving about it, and has wired for a private detective to come down at once. The thieves simply cleared off everything he had, including all the championship cups. A detective is coming down, at once, from London. The Head thinks it must be someone at the school, or someone who knows the school well. They broke in through the dining-room window, after poisoning the dogs. The Head is sure it is someone who knows the dogs, because they never barked, or anything, before they were given the poisoned

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meat, and you know how they used to carry on when there was a stranger about."

"How do you know all this?"

"Biggar Major was in the Head's room when the call came through on the telephone, and heard all about it. The doctor said he could tell the rest of the school, and that there will be a handsome reward for the boy who can find a clue to the thieves and lead to the recovery of the property."

"Come on, you fellows, let's go and have a hunt for those clues," cried Yates, breaking into a run.

"Come back, you silly ass," shouted Biggar Minor. "You can't get any clues yet. The porter and the groundsman have been told off to stop anyone going near, or touching anything, until the detective has had a look round."

"So that he can collar the reward," said Yates, looking very disgusted. "I don't think it's fair; I am sure I could find as many clues as any old detective. All the same, I mean to have a shot at winning the reward."

"Ha, ha! Hurry up, Yates; I could do with a good feed at Mother Shipton's," cried Banks.

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"You won't get it," said Clay. "There are three of us who are going to win it—me, Biggar, and Smith."

"Hark to 'Sherlock Blake,' the great detective. What are you going to do with all the money you will get? Buy a steam yacht?"

"No; buy a set of gloves and give you a whacking."

"Better get someone to help you on that job. It's like the detective business—it's more than you can do."

"Can't I? I'll jolly well show you in a minute, if you like."

"Oh, cut it out, you two; you are always scrapping. Come on, Clay, let's go and dig Smith out and draw up a plan of action."

"Rather; we must decide how we are going to set about catching the thieves. Nothing like having a properly organised campaign and sticking to it. You'll feel pretty sick, Banks, when you see the Head handing the reward over to us and all the rest of the school standing round and cheering like mad."

So vivid was Clay's imagination he enjoyed the moment of greatness, in anticipation,

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almost as much as if it had actually arrived, and he almost wondered why the fellows did not cheer already. In his heart he felt a bit sorry for the other fellows. It would be such a disappointment to them all.

"You mean the other way round," retorted Banks. "I mean to win that reward, because I'm jolly keen on getting a new bike."

"Ha, ha, ha! This way for the early doors. Seats guaranteed for the greatest farce of the century, 'The Rival Detectives,' featuring 'Sherlock Clay' and 'Sexton Banks,' the world-renowned sleuths. Enormous attraction for the special matinee to-morrow, when Sherlock Clay will give a thrilling, lifelike exhibition of the great detective mind at work. Sleuthing by——"

The rest of the sentence was lost, as Wiffins dodged a rush by the indignant Clay. The idea caught on, and every boy in the Fourth made a mental note that he would be in at the kill, or, better still, that he would bring about the kill by working secretly, and so lift the reward.

In the excitement of the moment, Trueman's notice was forgotten. Only when they assembled in the classroom, after prayers,

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and found the master at his desk, with O'Mara standing by the side, did they have a suspicion as to the cause of the assembly.

"Silence," rapped Mr. Trueman, as the leaders in the rag of the previous night began to talk in whispers.

"Last night," he went on, "I met this new boy, O'Mara, in a disgraceful state in the corridor, and discovered that he had been the victim of some outrageous conduct on the part of his fellow-members of the Fourth Form."

The master was in an eloquent mood, and enlarged at length upon the enormity of the offence.

"Such happenings cannot be overlooked," he concluded, "and to save me from having to punish the whole of the form, I must ask those boys responsible to stand up."

No one moved. Initiation was a form rag, and it was understood, if trouble ever followed a ceremony, that the whole of the form took the blame. Mr. Trueman knew this, too, and he was preparing to pass sentence on the whole form when O'Mara interrupted him.

"If you please, sir, I can point the boys

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out who were the ringleaders in the affair," he said.

Master and boys became as silent as if someone had suddenly hypnotised them. Here was a development no one wanted. If the master had stumbled across a victim of initiation before he had had time to remove the traces of the ceremony—well, that was all in the luck of the game ; but that a boy should peach was unthinkable. Such a thing was never dreamed of, yet, here it was actually happening, and the whole room sat aghast as O'Mara, one by one, pointed out the ringleaders. No one was more annoyed than the master.

"Do you boys, who have been pointed out, admit that you were the ringleaders in this disgraceful affair?"

No answer.

"I take your silence as an admission of your guilt. The boys indicated will each write me two hundred lines. But I am convinced that the whole form was a party to the affair, and therefore the whole of the form will be confined to the school for a week."

Gated for a week! The Fourth were annoyed.

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“ Sneak ! Prig ! Beast ! ” The epithets were hurled at O’Mara the instant the master had left the room, but he never flinched. He faced the class with a smile, and still smiled when Clay stormed up to him, the picture of anger.

“ You miserable cad,” said the budding detective. “ I’ll fight you for that. Don’t forget. In the gym. as soon as lessons are over.”

“ You are perfectly at liberty to go to the gymnasium, if you wish, Clay, but I shall not be there. It is not my habit to indulge in common fights.”

“ Coward as well, eh ? Then take that.” Clay’s open hand struck Harry lightly on the cheek. How near Clay came to disaster at that moment he never knew. For a flash O’Mara’s hands clenched, and he was filled with a mad desire to knock Clay down. He paled, ever so slightly, and the boys took it as further evidence that he was afraid ; but he mastered the impulse, turned, and would have walked out of the room.

“ Coward ! Sneak ! Cad ! ” The cries assailed him from all sides as Clay interposed between him and the door.

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"Do you mean that you won't fight?"

"Exactly, Clay. It is not my intention to indulge in a common brawl."

Again that impulse to violence had to be fought down, as Harry tried to leave the room and Clay held him.

"Just a minute; we've not finished with you yet. What are we going to do about it, you fellows? He won't fight."

"Send him to Coventry."

The suggestion was seized upon in an instant, and the whole class yelled for that punishment.

"You hear? O'Mara is hereby sent to Coventry. Except in class no one will sit near him or be seen in his company. Any other fellow in the Fourth seen talking to O'Mara will be sent to Coventry as well."

Harry laughed in their faces, and as soon as lessons were over he went off to his study. Miggles was already there, deep in some experiment.

"Well, Miggles, what do you think of it? I imagine those fellows have had their lesson and will leave me alone in the future."

Miggles went on with his experiment without a word.

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" I say, Miggles, you are jolly rude, you know. I asked you a question."

" I heard you."

" They why didn't you answer ? "

" Because I don't want to talk to sneaks and cowards. I'm pretty easy-going, as a rule, but there is a limit and you're it. If it's any news to you, I've asked Raikes to transfer me to another study. Well, what did he say ? "

The question was put to Gleeson, who had entered the room.

" It's O.K. ; Raikes says you can come into my study. Legge has smashed his arm, and won't be back this term, so there is room for you."

" Good. I'll come right away. Help me to put my things together ; I want to get out of this place as soon as I can. The air does not seem very healthy."

O'Mara flushed a fiery red at the insult, but he kept silent, and was putting his beloved chessmen out before Miggles had gone.

Sent to Coventry ! Harry laughed when he was left alone. If all the boys were such ruffians as they had shown themselves to be at the initiation, he did not mind. He preferred to be left severely alone. All his

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mistaken training told him he was right, and yet, as he sat there by the open window, and looked down on the merry groups of boys that dotted the quad., the little devil, Doubt, assailed him. It was so active that he did not hear the door open.

"Well, sonny, you seem to have put your foot in it nicely. What's all the trouble about?" The kindly voice of Raikes broke in on Harry's thoughts.

"Nothing, really, only the other boys in the form have rather queer ideas. They imagine they can treat a boy just as they like, and that he has no right to object."

"But I understand you sneaked to True-man."

"If, by that, you mean I reported the assault upon myself to the master, you are quite right. I hope it is not expected that a new boy here shall remain silent when subjected to such an indignity. I had a perfect right to enter a complaint."

"No one disputes your right; but it isn't done, sonny. You'll make yourself frightfully unpopular here if you go on in that way."

"Well, I don't mind. I've no desire for cheap popularity, and at least it will have

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taught the boys to leave me alone. That is all I want. I didn't want to come to your school, and so long as I am here I mean to live my own life."

"I am afraid you'll find it can't be done ; but I wish you joy. Personally, I would advise you to remember the old saying, 'When in Rome do as Rome does.'"

"Oh, that idea is out of date. Because I, against my wishes, am sent to live with a lot of untidy little hooligans, it does not mean that I, too, have to become like them."

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CHAPTER VI.

“ SHERLOCK CLAY ” AT WORK.

The days that followed were exciting in the school. The London detective duly arrived, carefully examined the scene of the burglary, and departed, after making long entries in his note-book.

“ He says it’s the work of a London gang, whose leader is known as Light-fingered Jack,” said Wiffins, who, by pretending to be absorbed in a book had managed to overhear a talk between the Head and the detective. “ He’s gone back to town to see if he can trace the ‘ swag,’ as he called it, being disposed of. Says that’s the only way to get on the track of the gang.”

“ But how does he know it’s Light-fingered Jack ? ”

“ Easy. These detectives are trained to

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read signs. They just look at a thing and can tell you at once that the criminal was a man with red hair, a squint, and a broken tooth."

"Oh, I say, Wiffins, draw it mild."

"It's quite true. You read some of the detective yarns, and you'll see how it's done. Why, that chap from London just looked at the window, and he knew at once who had stolen the things. It's quite easy when you know how it's done. Just needs a bit of practice, that's all. Why, if Baggs took a bite out of an apple and left it lying about—the apple, not the bite—you could tell who had bitten it without having to ask. It's just the same with Light-fingered Jack. He can't help leaving traces. He does his work in his own peculiar way and the detectives know at once who's done it."

"But apples are different and, besides, no one in the school can take a bite as big as Baggs. If he had a bite at an apple, a real bite, there would not be enough of the apple left to identify it."

"Well, I don't believe that the detective knows all about the burglary, and I'm going to have a look round myself, to find some

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clues," interposed Biggar Minor. "Come on, Clay and Smith, let's go and inspect the scene of the crime. The Head has had the guard taken off and the coast is clear."

Not only the two boys named, but every other boy within earshot, accepted the invitation and trooped off to the spot. The first call was made at the dog-kennel, where the members of the "Triple Alliance," as Biggar, Smith, and Clay had named themselves, set to work. They had spent the intervening hours studying some choice selections of detective literature, borrowed from the gardener's boy, and were well primed as to the methods to follow. Their first difficulty was that the path was asphalt, and, consequently, there were no footprints to study, to the disgust of Biggar, who had borrowed some plaster of Paris from the lab.

"H'm, not much use looking here for clues, old man," he said, in his best professional manner.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Clay. "You remember the fellow in the story was in the same difficulty, and he hunted round until he found a bit of dry mud that gave him a clue to the murderer."

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"But we are dealing with burglars and, besides, there's no mud here."

"How do we know before we've had a good hunt? It's not a bit of use our trying to be detectives if we take it for granted that there are no clues to be found. If we hunt about long enough, we are bound to find some mud. They always do in the books I've read, and then we'll be able to say who the thief was, and where he came from."

"We want a magnifying-glass, you know, and we haven't got one."

"Oh, yes, we have," cut in Smith. "I bagged the glass from the big end of the doctor's telescope. It makes a ripping magnifying-glass."

With all his objections met, Clay dropped on to his hands and knees, followed by Biggar and Smith. By this time the other fellows were fully interested.

"Ha, ha, ha. Just look at these silly asses!" yelled Wiffins, with glee. "Good dog, seek 'em," he added, patting Clay on the head and making a hissing noise through his teeth, such as is supposed to encourage a dog to greater efforts.

"Chuck it, Wiffins. Don't be a bigger

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ass than you need to be," growled the sleuth, rising to his feet with fists doubled and an expression of fury that made Wiffins seek safety in flight to the back of the crowd.

"If you haven't enough brains to be a detective yourself, that's no reason why you should act the giddy goat and interfere with us when we're at work."

With this parting thrust, Clay got laboriously back on to his knees. At that precise moment he and Smith each set his eyes on a small object that glinted in the sunlight as it lay on the path. They dived together for it and, in the excitement of the moment, allowed their heads to meet with a resounding bump. They sat back and counted the collection of shooting stars, while the other fellows laughed until their sides ached.

"Wow, my head, you ass," howled Clay, clapping his dust-begrimed hands to his damp forehead with disastrous results to his complexion. "What do you want to go barging about like that for, you—you—elephant? You know very well I saw it first."

"I know very well you didn't. Why, you never saw it at all, until I was about to pick

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it up, and then you must go and barge in like a hare-brained hippopotamus. When you are going to look for clues again, you might let me know, and I'll take jolly good care that I go into the next field. It's not safe to be within a mile of you."

"Why, you lunatic, you know very well that I'd just got my hand on the thing, when you butted me, like the goat you are. You
——"

"What's all the trouble?" asked Banks, who had just appeared on the scene, while the rest of the onlookers howled with delight.

"Dunno," replied Baggs. "I threw a bit of broken button on the path a few seconds back, and Clay and Smith seem to have taken a fancy to it; they are quarrelling like a couple of Kilkenny cats over it. Been butting each other on the head, and things like that."

"What! You put it there?" Baggs dodged, just in time to evade Clay's rush.

"But what's the giddy idea?"

"They are looking for clues so that they can catch the burglar and collar the reward. They seemed so unhappy about not finding anything, I thought I would give them a bit

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of button. They were quite pleased about it. Just like a couple of kids with a new toy. It seemed to buck them up no end."

"I suppose you think you are very funny," said the wrathful Clay. "Just you wait till I catch you, that's all. I'll give you buttons."

"But you can have it, Clay; I don't really want it, and it would be a pity if you wasted all that energy and got nothing for your trouble."

"What in the world do they hope to find?" Banks put the question.

"Well, they are looking for a bit of mud. They've been reading a book about a detective who tracked a murderer by finding a bit of mud that had fallen off a boot, and they mean to track the burglars in the same way. You might have thought they were trying a new turn as knockabout comedians, or something like that."

There was a fresh outburst of laughter at this sally, and Baggs had again to dodge a rush by the infuriated sleuths.

"It's all right you fellows laughing," said Banks, seriously. "I think it's a jolly fine idea. Come on, Clay, I'll help you."

"No, you won't. You can jolly well keep out. We three thought of it first, and we

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are not going to let anyone come and steal our ideas. I——”

The interruption came from Biggar Minor. With the true detective spirit he pursued the search, in spite of the accident to his chum, and now he sprang to his feet with a cry of pain, and buried two grimy fingers in his mouth.

“ You clumsy chump, Phelps,” he yelled. “ Can’t you look where you are going, and not walk on a fellow’s fingers ? ”

“ Sorry ; I thought I was well clear of you, but you went and shoved your fingers under my feet.”

“ Well, don’t think again. Next time just remember the size of your feet and make allowances. It’s not safe to be on the path while you’re about, with feet like that. Why don’t you hire yourself out as an animated steam-roller, or something like that ? ”

“ All right, don’t get excited. Who expects to find you grovelling about on your hands and knees, as though you were back in your infancy, in years, as well as habits. You——”

“ Cut it out, you fellows. I think it’s a jolly good idea. All the best detectives do it,

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and it's the only way to find a clue that will be the least value," said Banks. "Why, if it wasn't that it would not be fair to Clay and the others I'd have a cut at it myself. Don't be asses ! Let them get back to their work."

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CHAPTER VII.

MUDLARKING.

As Banks was the greatest practical joker of the school, his hint carried weight. Clay tried to be magnanimous.

“Sorry Banks, but there are three of us in this already, and if any more came in there’d be a crowd. These other fellows think the whole thing is a joke, but they’ll feel jolly sick when we get the reward.”

If he had seen the wink Banks had used with his words, Clay might not have been so gracious, but, “What the eye sees not——”

The three sleuths got back to their task, quartering the ground, and examining everything through the magnifying-glass. They were very thorough about it, too, but were in a difficulty, as all the dust and dried mud they could find appeared alike to them. At last Biggar made a discovery. Yes, there, on

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the ground, was a bit of dried mud that certainly was different from all the other bits. Excitedly the three gathered round it, not daring to move the evidence, but examining it intently through the glass. Their heads were close together, and so wrapped up were they in their job that they did not see what Banks was doing.

Just near the kennels was a duck-pond, and the practical joker paid a hurried visit to this.

The "detectives" were still on their hands and knees when he got back. For a moment he stood and watched them, with a smile playing about his lips. Then he acted.

"Splash!" A scoopful of semi-liquid mud, that he had taken from the duck-pond, dropped in front of the heads of the three searchers, and freely besprinkled their features. The whole of the onlookers were convulsed.

"Wow!" spluttered Biggar, vainly trying to remove a liberal splash from his left eye. "What did you do that for, you silly ass?"

"Well, I thought you were looking for mud, and it would have been such a pity if you had not found any."

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Clay's gorge rose as he listened to the rest of the form giving a very creditable imitation of the laughing chorus. As he rose he ejected a quantity of the mud from his mouth. He had been the worst sufferer, and the form was reduced to helplessness at the sight of his face. His usual somewhat sharp features were lost, as if under a black mask, and it did not improve matters as he rubbed his hands about in a vain attempt to remove the obnoxious stuff.

"G-r-r-r." He did not say anything that could be understood, but it was evident that the taste of the duck-pond deposit did not suit his palate. Smith was stamping and raving, while Biggar added to the chorus of hate. But Banks made a mistake. The result of his inspiration had been better than he expected, and he stayed to rejoice. It was fatal. With one frantic and sudden rush, Clay managed to lay hands on the tormentor, and before Banks could break the hold, the other two had come to their leader's aid.

Banks, struggling hard, was held firmly.

"Thanks for the mud," said Clay, in a steely tone. "We wanted something like that to teach you idiots a lesson. Come on,

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you two, let's give him a dose of his own medicine."

No second invitation was needed. Smith and Biggar held Banks a prisoner while Clay got busy. A little more mud made no difference to the leading sleuth, and, grabbing a generous handful, he proceeded to rub it all over Banks's face, to the delight of the rest of the form, who were quickly reduced to a state of weakness, from the violence of their laughter.

"Wow, stop it, you fellows!" Banks began, but a taste of the mud convinced him it were better to keep silent. Carefully and methodically Clay went about his work, plastering the mud in the eyes, ears, and all over the face. When he had finished and there was no more mud left on the ground, he stood back and viewed his handiwork with the air of a man who was proud of the job.

"That'll do," he said. "Banks looks really pretty now, and I'm sure he's been enjoying himself, seeing that he's so fond of mud. Like a bit more, eh, Horace?"

"I'll give you some more," said that victim, sore at the joke having recoiled on to his own head. He made a dash for the pond,

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but the three sleuths followed him so closely, with threats to roll him in the slime if he went near the edge, that he changed his mind. For a moment Smith stood and viewed the expanse of slime, and then the roar of laughter from behind him stung him to action. Before he quite knew what he was doing, he had caught up a handful of the objectionable stuff. Clay and Biggar followed suit, and so armed they went off to interview the rest of the form. They advanced at a run, and so great was the hurry of the threatened boys to escape that they fell over each other.

Singling out a face here and there in the struggling mass, Clay and his chums decorated each until there was hardly a boy who did not bear a trace of the attack. What would have happened, it is difficult to say, had not Raikes chosen that moment to appear on the scene.

“Hello, you silly chumps, what kid’s game is this? Put that down, Clay. My goodness! Anyone who did not know you would think you were still in your infancy. I wonder you don’t start a mud-pie-making competition. It is about all some of you are fit for.”

“All right, there’s no need to be sarcastic.

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I'm only giving those chaps a bit of their own medicine. They come and monkey round when we are trying to find clues to the burglary. Just teaching them a lesson, that's all."

"Well, the lesson is closed and you fellows had better scoot and get rid of that dirt before any of the masters come this way. I would feel really sorry for you if old True-man saw you now."

"Eh, what's that?"

Raikes jumped round at the voice and found himself facing the master.

"Sorry, sir. I did not know you were there."

"Dear me, what is the matter with those boys? They look as though they have been in the duck-pond. It looks like mud. Yes, it is mud. Who is the inspirer of this preposterous prank?"

Clay tried to look as though he knew nothing about it.

"I don't know, sir," said Raikes. "I suppose it started innocently enough, and that the boys went further than they intended."

"Well, they have turned themselves into a lot of scarecrows while dabbling in their natural element. But we have to learn to

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subdue our natures, you know. As an aid to that, you boys will each write me three hundred lines; and, I warn you, if this is what happens when you are confined to the school, I shall have to see that, in future, your detention is put on regular lines by appointing a prefect to sit on guard over you. Go and remove the mud from yourselves at once."

Feeling very dejected, the form went off to the bathroom.

The detective instincts of the Triple Alliance had had a severe check; but it was not enough to kill them altogether.

"I know what we want," Biggar proffered the remark to his fellow sleuths.

"Oh, shut up, and let me get on with these rotten lines," grunted Clay.

"All right, keep your wig on. All I was going to say is that we want a bloodhound to help us in the hunt for those burglars."

"Oh, is that all? I suppose you will just go down to your private kennel, whistle to your dog, and there we are," said Clay.

"No. But I was just thinking that Tom, the ostler at the Royal York, has a dog he says is a bloodhound. We might borrow that."

"Any more silly ideas? Of course we

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might borrow it, but for two things—we are confined to school, and if we did get the dog we would not have anywhere to put it.”

“ We could dodge out to-night and run to the town easily enough. I know he’ll lend us the dog.”

“ And what are you going to do with it when you’ve got it ? ”

“ We could put him in our study ; he would not have to be there very long,” said Biggar, who was very keen on the idea. “ No one would have any need to know we’d got the dog, and it would help us in the hunt.”

Clay tried to get on with his lines, but the idea had caught him.

“ I say,” he said to Smith, who came into the study, “ we’re going to borrow the bloodhound from the Royal York, and hunt those burglars with it.”

“ Bloodhound ? When ? ”

“ To-night. We are going to sneak out of the school when all is quiet and run to town. We are going to put him in our study.”

There was a fierce argument as to which of the three should stay behind and keep watch, and in the end Smith was cast for that unpleasant duty.

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CHAPTER VIII.

HIRING A "BLOODHOUND."

It was no new thing for Clay and Biggar to get out of school at night, and when all was quiet they dropped from the window and scurried off in the direction of the town, a matter of ten minutes' run. They hurried, in the hope of getting back safe and sound before the master, or anyone else, discovered their absence.

"Well, and what be you young gents after?"

The ostler put the question, and not in too-inviting tones. He had been the victim of pranks by "they imps from the school," as he called them, and was always on his guard.

"We want to borrow Tiger."

"And what may you be wanting the dog for?"

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“To hunt burglars,” said Clay, in a dramatic whisper.

“To hunt—ha, ha, ha! Fancy you two going off to hunt burglars! And where may the burglars be?”

“Up at the school house. They’ve run off with all the Head’s silver, and we want to catch them and earn the reward.”

The word “reward” was fatal. Tom ever had an eye on the main chance.

“It’ll cost you a bit. You know blood-hounds are not ordinary dogs.”

Here was something Clay had not expected, and his jaw fell.

“I tell you what we’ll do,” he said, after a pause, “we’ll give you part of the reward when we get it.”

Tom had little faith in his own dog.

“Won’t do, young gents. What I always says is, cash down, and then there’s no room for argufying after. Unless you puts the money down, you don’t get the dog; that’s final.”

“How much?” asked Biggar, in a disgusted voice, digging a reluctant hand into his pocket.

Tom was not to be caught napping.

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"How much is the reward the dog is going to get for you?"

"I think the Head said £10," said Clay, doubtfully.

"Then I'll say a pound."

"A what? Just for borrowing your dog for a day. We don't want to buy him, you know," cut in Biggar.

"Buy Tiger for a pound! Why, it would take pounds and pounds to buy him. Do you young gents happen to know how much bloodhounds cost? There isn't a dearer dog on the market, and, more'n that, it costs heaps of money to have them trained properly. I don't know but what, if I put Tiger in a sale, I'd get a hundred pounds for him. There are not many dogs like him in the country, and there's a heap of gents what want to buy him."

Clay and Biggar looked at Tiger with expressions of awe. They knew he was a good dog. Tom had told them so time after time, but they had not the least idea he was worth all that money.

If ever a dog belied his name Tiger did. There was nothing fierce about him, and there was a good deal more mastiff in his make-up

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than bloodhound. Indeed, he was somewhat mixed in his pedigree, and amongst half-a-dozen breeds it was impossible to say with certainty which was the one that stood out, the chief thing about him was his size, and, after the price his owner placed on his head, he loomed larger than ever in the eyes of the boys.

"Well, it's no use, we haven't got a pound," said Clay, regretfully.

"I don't want to be hard on you gents. How much have you got?"

Followed much searching of pockets.

"Seven shillings and fourpence and a French penny," announced Biggar.

"Well, gents, I don't want to stand in the way of sport. We'll say ten shillings. I'll take the seven you've got, and you'll owe me the other three."

Clay sighed, and paid the money over. There was not much enthusiasm in his voice as he ordered Tiger to "come on," and attached himself to the end of the dog's chain. There was no time to be lost if they were to get back in time to escape discovery, and the two wanted to hurry. Tiger, however, had other views. Some problem was troubling

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his massive brain, and every now and then he sat down with wrinkled brows and pondered over it. The more the boys urged him, the more thoughtful he became, and the journey back to school, instead of taking ten minutes, occupied the greater part of an hour. Added to the delay was the ever-present fear of meeting anyone from the school, and when they did eventually reach their destination, the two boys were not in the sweetest of tempers. It was otherwise with Tiger. Once in the quadrangle he showed a disposition to waken up, and it took the united efforts of the two to hold his enthusiasm in check. He had his nose pointed towards the scene of the burglary, and seemed eager to go that way. The two sleuths regarded this as a good sign.

"He's anxious to set off at once," said Biggar, with enthusiasm.

"Yes; he's frightfully keen. I vote we get up early in the morning and put him on the trail."

"Rather. It's going to be frightfully exciting."

Biggar was right. It was going to be exciting, and the fun was to begin before they

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expected it. By superior weight they dragged Tiger to a spot below the study window. Here a great problem faced them. The window was reached by a trip over the lean-to roof of the wood shed, and Tiger did not feel in the least bit inclined to jump when they ordered him to do so in hoarse whispers. Still, difficulties are met only to be overcome, and Biggar's inventive mind soon found a way out.

"Grab a couple of planks and put them so Tiger can walk up and get to the top of the shed," he whispered.

Clay loosed his hold on the chain to do so, and Tiger promptly went for a stroll, with the unwilling Biggar following behind. In his hurry, Clay made an awful clatter, and, to their dismay, the boys heard a window open and the voice of the French master enquiring as to who was there.

"Come on, you brute," said Clay, giving a vicious tug at the chain. "We've got to hurry or we'll be caught."

By main force they dragged the resisting Tiger up the planks, nearly strangling him in the process, and they were crouched beneath the window.

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"In you go, Tiger," said Biggar, pointing the dog's nose to the open window and giving him a mighty push. "Hey, Smith, lend a hand."

Tiger sat down to think it over.

"Let's get inside and pull him in," suggested Clay. "If the three of us pull hard enough he's bound to come."

Smith came to lend his aid, and the three tugged at the chain with all their might. Tiger's determination not to go through the window became more and more pronounced. Common little dogs might do things like that, but not canine aristocrats. He decided to protest by uttering a fierce growl, just as a door opened and a man carrying a lighted candle appeared.

In one last frantic effort to get the dog in the room, the three boys got in each other's way. Smith tripped and fell, bringing Biggar with him. Clay felt the chain slipping through his fingers, made a dive, and the next minute Tiger was free. His freedom came unexpectedly.

With a yelp of surprise the dog rolled off the roof, to be brought up with a bump that occasioned another yelp, this time of pain.

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It was then that the French master reached the spot. What he imagined he saw he did not say. Tiger, voicing his annoyance in no uncertain tones, rose to his feet and moved forward. That was quite enough for M. Le Blanc. He did not stop to investigate; he turned and fled as fast as his short legs would carry him, beating the dog in the race by just enough time as enabled him to slam the door and collapse panting on the floor of the corridor as the disappointed Tiger sniffed about outside.

"Gee, you chaps, that puts the fat on the fire. You've done it now," said Clay.

"I like that. Why didn't you stick to the chain, instead of letting the dog free? But did you see Froggy? My word, he was funny." Biggar found it difficult to control his mirth.

"It's all very well laughing, but we can't leave the dog out there all night. We've got to get him inside before Froggy alarms the school."

"I know," said Smith, in a moment of inspiration; "there's half a meat pie in the cupboard; let's tempt him in with that."

Tiger was hungry, and the smell of the

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pie held temptingly before his nose decided him. He needed no urging this time, but bounded through the window, which was promptly shut behind him, and he was a prisoner. Not a minute too soon. The moment the window was closed Froggy reappeared in the quad., accompanied by Mr. Kemp, the gym. master, to whom he had told a wonderful tale of a fierce, wild animal, as big as a donkey, that had sprung out on him howling, and with huge, glaring eyes.

“He wass there, and he spring out upon me wiss ze howl of ze wolf.”

“Well, he’s not here now, Le Blanc, and he’s nowhere in the quad. It must have been a stray dog, and I guess he was just about as much alarmed as you were.”

Le Blanc vowed it was no dog, wrote the matter down as a mystery, and returned to his room.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE BITER BIT.

There was one boy in the Fourth who had not shown the least interest in the burglar-hunt—O'Mara. The idea of being sent to Coventry did not trouble him. Indeed, he rather liked it, for it meant he would be left alone. That was exactly what he wanted, though it was about the worst thing that could happen to him. He laughed to himself as Raikes left the study, dug out his chessmen, and was deep in an involved problem in a few minutes. Life at school would not be so bad, after all, he told himself. There would not be a succession of boys dashing into his study to annoy him. He was a bit sorry Miggles had left, because he rather liked the Owl, but he was not going to weep over the fact. Cricket? Well, it was a fine excuse to

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cut games completely, and he renewed his smile.

He had flung his window open, and could hear the murmur of the sea away in the distance. That was good. Swimming was the one athletic exercise that appealed to him, and there was a trace of the true spirit of the O'Maras in the fact that he had made himself proficient in the water far beyond the average. He told himself that on a hot summer afternoon, when the other boys were sweltering on the cricket field, he would toddle off to the beach and have a cool plunge in the sea. He waxed enthusiastic over the prospect and was moved to go and ask Raikes if there were any restrictions as to bathing. With all his faults, there was one merit about O'Mara. If a thing had to be done he would do it at once and not rest until it was done. He must see Raikes about the swimming, so he set off there and then.

“ I say, O'Mara, I want a word with you.”

The call from Biggar Major reached him as he walked along the corridor. It was carefully ignored. Harry walked on as though there was not a soul in sight, and Biggar, quick to anger, darted after him.

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"Did you hear?" he asked, planting himself in Harry's path. "I said I wanted a word with you."

"Oh, yes, I heard you; but the desire is not mutual. I assure you I do not want to talk with you."

"You cheeky young bounder. It's a good licking you need. For two pins I'd give you one, too."

"Really, Biggar, the sentiment fits you. I suppose when you find you can't bully a boy, you think you will give him a licking, as you call it."

"I'll give you one in a minute, you young prig. You've got to apologise for your cheek when I asked you to go to the tuck-shop."

"My dear Biggar, you are quite mistaken. There is nothing I have to apologise for, and therefore you will get no apology."

"Then you can take that," said Biggar, blazing with anger.

"That" was a stinging blow on the cheek from Biggar's right hand. It hurt, and for the first time in his life Harry forgot his training. With a howl of fury that would have shocked his aunt had she heard it, he hurled himself at the bigger boy and tried to fling him to the

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ground. It was just what Biggar wanted. At boxing and wrestling he could beat anyone in the school, even the mighty Raikes himself, and he got home with several blows that hurt before O'Mara's arms closed round him.

Harry was white with fury. Discretion was thrown to the winds in the desire to hurt the boy, and as Biggar's arm was raised to ward off the attack it crossed his mouth. Only for a moment did it rest there; but it was long enough to give Harry time to act. The next moment a howl of pain awakened the echoes of the corridor, for Harry's teeth had closed with a snap on the fleshy part of Biggar's forearm. There was not enough strength to break through the cloth of the coat-sleeve, but quite enough to hurt, and Biggar yelled.

"You miserable little cannibal!" he cried. "I'll teach you a lesson for that."

For the next two minutes Harry was the centre of a tornado. Blows, hundreds of them, came for nowhere and hit him violently about the body. He winced, but never turned tail. He came from a stock that did not quit, and though he was powerless to stem the tide of blows, he stood his ground in the hope of hitting the elusive figure before him. One

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punch knocked him clean off his feet, and very few boys would have cared to rise and face more of the kind. Not so Harry. He was up again and ready to fight on, unequal though the battle was, until he was knocked unconscious. Biggar grunted from his exertions. He had set out to punish the boy, in the belief that a few hard blows would cow him, and now he found he had to fight as hard as he knew to stop the boy from hurting him. There was only one way out, and that was to give a knock-out punch. He was debating the wisdom of this, much though he disliked the idea, when Raikes and Scott appeared.

"Drop that, Biggar."

The command rang out sharply, and Biggar obeyed at once. He dropped his guard and turned away, as a smashing blow from Harry caught him on the mouth. Harry saw his chance. The prefect was undefended, and Raikes did not exist. With a howl of rage he sought to follow up the blow, but his arm was arrested in mid-air.

"Stop it, you little lunatic. Didn't you hear me tell you to drop fighting? Wow, you little beast. Bring him into the study, Scott. He needs a lesson, and he's going to get one."

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“ Why? What’s he done? ”

“ Done? Why the little fiend has bitten me. See.”

Raikes held up his hand to show where Harry’s teeth had broken the skin, and Harry was sobered by the sight. He had not meant to bite Raikes, but he had to hurt someone, and, as his arms were held in a vice, only his teeth were left. He was given no chance to explain. Rough hands seized him, and he was borne off to the captain’s study.

“ Now, you little wretch, I’ll teach you that biting is not allowed here,” said Raikes, in a voice that was dangerously calm. “ You come here to this school, thinking you can jolly well do just what you like, and you haven’t been here a week before you’re biting people. I don’t know what the trouble was between you and Biggar—— ”

“ He bit me because I boxed his ears for giving cheek. That’s why I was lamming him,” cut in Biggar.

“ Well, next time he does anything like that let me know and I’ll attend to him. I am quite ready to take this young gentleman in hand, and I’ll give him his first lesson now. Come on, you and Scott hold him.”

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The pair needed no urging. O'Mara was caught in hands that held him firm and placed across the table. Raikes gave him a dozen hard swishes from the cane that hurt, but not a sound escaped the boy. With teeth gritted, he determined that he would not cry out, no matter what happened.

"That will do," said Raikes, as O'Mara was placed back on his feet. "Now, youngster, I was sorry to have to give you a whacking, seeing that you have not been here many days ; but it had to be done. The sooner you learn that you have to abide by the rules of the school, the better it will be for you. You can go."

"I shall go straight to the Head and report you."

"Oh, yes ; I had forgotten that. I expected you to say you would go to the Head. It's a nuisance ; but I suppose we had better make that point clear to you, once and for all. Come on, I'll go to the Head with you."

He caught Harry by the arm and marched him off to the Head's study.

"Come in. Yes, Raikes, what is it ? "

"I've brought this new boy here for a lesson, sir. Just now I had occasion to punish

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him, and gave him a dozen swishes with the cane. He thinks I have exceeded my powers as captain."

"Before I can decide that, I must know the reason for the punishment."

"I'd rather not tell, sir, if you don't mind."

"I'll tell you, sir. He was bullying me, and I bit him," said Harry.

"Bit Raikes? Surely my boy, you have taken leave of your senses. As for your story that the captain of Whitegate bullied you, that is unthinkable. We must get to the truth."

Bit by bit the Head dragged the truth from the reluctant Raikes.

"Dear me, I never heard of such a thing," he said, at the end. "You were quite right to bring him here, Raikes. I will see that he is punished for his disgraceful conduct."

"No, sir; I don't want that. That is not why I brought him here. I think he's been punished quite enough. What I wish is that you tell him I have not gone beyond the power you give to me in giving him a swishing."

"Gone beyond your powers, Raikes? My only criticism would be that you were too lenient. My boy"—turning to Harry—"you were in the wrong. Raikes has my full

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authority to maintain discipline. The captain is the boy in whom I place the greatest trust. I know him to be just, and if he canes a boy I know that it is not without good cause. You may go. Raikes, I want a word with you on the question of school games."

O'Mara returned to his lonely study in a whirl of amazement. He had been at Whitegate three days, and his stay had been one long succession of shocks. The greatest had been the last—to find that the Head not only did not punish Raikes for striking him with the cane, but actually blamed the captain for not being more severe. His ideas needed revising, apparently. Then there was the fight with Biggar Major or, at least, what he intended should have been a fight. He was not very much upset over having so far forgotten his training as to indulge in a common fight; what did worry him was the fact that he had done his best to hurt Biggar, and all his efforts had been wasted. That made him think furiously. He lacked little physically, though his muscles were not hardened and trained like those of the prefect, but he had entered upon the affair with the knowledge of a boy indulging in his first scrap.

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How was it Biggar had managed to hit him just as he liked, and he had not been able to get in a single blow by way of return? Biggar was not a wizard, yet there was something. Yes, that was it. Raikes had said something about Biggar being the best boxer in the school. Harry seemed to remember having read in the papers of men who stood up in a ring and hit each other and got a big reward in money for doing so. He had always supposed that was a game only for rough persons, and not one a gentleman would take up; yet here was Biggar, a prefect at the school, and Raikes said he was the best boxer in the school.

It had never occurred to him that a knowledge of boxing might be useful and, even now, he was not so sure that he ought to take it up. Still, it looked as if he was going to have a great deal of trouble from Biggar, and perhaps it would be as well if he learned something about boxing, after all. Yes, he must learn to use his hands. How? He knew. He had heard the boys speak of a man at the local hotel who knew all about boxing. He would go and see him.

Half-an-hour later Tom had a visitor from

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the school, and his pocket became heavier.

“Teach the young gent how to fight,” he said to himself, after the interview. “I will that, or my name is not Tom Mason. Nice and free he is with his money, too, and he’s a lad who will make a champion, if he takes to the game. But, my, ain’t he green? Don’t even know how to put his hands up. Tom, my boy, you’ve taken a stiff job on, but you’ll pull it off, because there’s money in it. All the same, I’d like to know who he’s aiming at. There is a scrap ahead I’d like to see, when he knows more than he does at present.”

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CHAPTER X.

WHEN THE GHOST WALKED.

“ O-o-o-o-o ! ”

The cry, long drawn out, broke over the stillness of the night at Whitegate. Silence, and then again that horrible sound. Wiffins, who happened to be awake, heard it, and was afraid.

“ Wow, it’s the ghost ! ” he yelled, in a voice that served to waken the rest of the Fourth Form Dormitory, and then he promptly buried his head beneath the bedclothes. At heart Wiffins was not a hero, and that eerie cry in the dead of the night had wakened the terrors in him.

“ O-o-o-o-o-o ! ”

Louder and longer this time, and not a boy in the dormitory but felt his hair rising on his head, and queer, prickling sensations playing up and down his spine. Suddenly,

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someone sat up. Like a flock of sheep the others followed suit, trembling and afraid. All, save Wiffins. If the other fellows chose to risk the coming of the ghost, they were welcome. He had read all he wanted to know about spooks and that kind of thing, and he was not anxious to meet one in the dead of night. He buried himself deeper in the clothes. Then he remembered the lesson on Shakespeare, and the part about "the mystic hour of night, when churchyards yawn, and graves give up their dead." Wiffins groaned in his fright. Some of the fellows heard him, and they, too, dived under the clothes. The bolder spirits continued to sit up, listening.

"O-o-o-o-o!"

A little softer, and not so long, ending in something like a growl, and followed by the clanking of heavy chains.

"What is it?"

Sturgess broke the silence in the room with the trembling question. His voice seemed to restore a little confidence to the others.

"It's the spirit of your past sins come to find you out, my son," replied Banks, who alone in the dormitory appeared to be composed.

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“ D-d-don’t rot, Banks. It isn’t a laughing matter. W-w-what—oh, lawks ! ”

The strange cry gave the answer to the unfinished question, and Sturgess felt his heart fail him. A moment later he was imitating Wiffins, though he did leave one eye uncovered to keep watch on a patch of pale light that the full moon threw on the floor of the dormitory.

“ It’s the ghost of Whitegate,” said Banks, in a deep voice. “ If you ask me anything, it’s far from happy, too. Any of you fellows game to come with me and have a hunt for it ? ”

“ Listen to the hero,” chirruped Hardman. “ Banks, my boy, you can go ghost hunting on your little lonesome. I have never believed the story myself, but the tale is told that at one time Whitegate was a monastery, before it was rebuilt, of course, and that one night one of the monks went mad and attacked the rest. Quite a lot came to a gory end before they killed him, and as a punishment his spirit was doomed to wander for ever in the scene of his crimes. It is tommy rot, of course ; but I’m not going hunting at this time of the night, with a healthy spook hanging about.”

“ I have heard that the ghost carries its

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head in one hand and that the eyes glare so much it is able to see where it is going. It uses its head as a lantern, while in the other hand it carries the chains that were used to bind it when it was alive. The story goes that when anyone can hear the clanking of the chains, someone is going to die."

"O-o-o-o!"

Again the terrifying cry, and not a boy but was ready to swear that it was accompanied by the clanking of ghostly chains and the hollow groans of a spirit in torment.

"I-I-I-I say; i-i-i-t's not true?"

The whispered question came from Wif-fins' bed.

"True? Of course not," laughed Banks. "Come on with me, someone, and we'll go and catch the silly old monk. We might be able to collar its head. It would look jolly well stuck up on the wardrobe. Come on, you cowards; who's going with me to hunt it out?"

A dead silence followed.

"I say," whispered Biggar Minor, to Clay, "let's go. It will be a lark, ghost-hunting."

"Ghost, you ass! It isn't a ghost; it's that beastly dog, and if he goes on making

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that noise he'll waken the whole school, and then there'll be the dickens of a row. What are we going to do about it?"

"What can we do?"

"I think the only thing is to sneak out and give him a clump over the head that'll teach him to be quiet."

"Yes, that's the idea," said Smith. "Go on with Clay, Biggar. I'll keep watch here."

"You would, of course. Lie snug and nice in bed while we take all the risk. My word, though, if something isn't done quickly we are in for the biggest row that ever was in this school. Just listen to the way the beggar is carrying on."

In one long-drawn-out howl Tiger excelled himself.

"I wonder what's the matter with him?"

"I suppose he's baying the moon. I think that's the word. All dogs do it when they see the full moon. We'd better go and pull the blind down."

"Well, whatever it is, we've jolly well got to do something to stop it," grunted Clay, getting out of bed. "Come on, Smith."

The reluctant Smith followed his leader

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and Banks followed the pair. This was exactly what they did not want.

“ Scoot for the study as hard as you can,” Smith whispered to Clay, “ while I head Banks in the opposite direction.”

Clay disappeared, and as Banks approached Smith managed to stumble and almost knock him down, and so give his chum time to get out of sight before he and the unwanted one were out of the room.

“ He’s run down this way,” he whispered to Banks, taking the ghost-hunter in the opposite direction from their study.

It was a boisterous Tiger that gambolled towards Clay, when he carefully closed the study door after him, and a moment later that youth found himself sitting heavily and painfully on the floor as something over a hundredweight of doggy enthusiasm floundered across his legs.

“ Be quiet, you brute ! ” he yelled, giving the dog a slap on the back. Unfortunately, he was misunderstood. The action, instead of producing the desired effect, only made Tiger the more joyful.

“ Ye gods ! do be quiet ! ” said the exasperated youth. “ We’ll have one of the

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masters here before you can say Jack Robinson if you are not careful, and then the fat'll be in the fire. You great, lumbering donkey, lie down. Oh, what in the world am I going to do?"

Inspiration came to him. Something to eat? They had some grub stowed away in the cupboard, sausage rolls that were the property of Biggar Minor, and a few other things. Clay hauled them forth and Tiger began to show the greatest interest in the proceedings. Clay held a succulent roll in his hand, and looked on it long and lovingly. It pained him to the heart to think of giving such things to a mere dog, yet something had to be done. With a sigh that came from the bottom of his boots, he flung a roll to Tiger, who wolfed it at one gulp, and looked for more. Another followed, and then, in sheer desperation at his position, Clay threw all regrets to the wind, drew down the blind of the room, and scattered the rest of the eatables on the floor, trusting that the time wasted in finding them would keep Tiger quiet. It did; but Clay sighed again when he thought of the awful waste of good food. Cautiously he sneaked back to his bed.

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"He's quiet now," whispered Biggar. "What did you do to him? Clump him on the head?"

"No; fed the brute; it was the only way."

"Fed him? With what?"

"Sausage rolls, and that kind of thing," replied Clay, in a voice from which all the joy had gone.

"Sausage what? You ass, do you mean to tell me that you gave that dog my sausages?"

"I did; it was the only way to get him quiet."

"Why didn't you hit him over the head with something? Anything, rather than give him my sausages?"

"It's all very well you saying that. You lie here in bed, leaving me and Smith to take the risk, and then you grouse because what's done doesn't suit you. The next time the dog howls, you can jolly well go and get him quiet yourself."

"Where's Smith?"

"Dunno. He side-tracked Banks while I went to the study, and he's not back yet."

"You should have let him go to the study. He wouldn't have given the food to the dog

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like you did. You are not fit to be let out without a keeper. I'll jolly well punch your head to-morrow. I'll—— ”

The rest of the threat was never uttered, for at that moment there came a startling yell, from the direction of the corridor, a pause, and then the sound of bare feet pattering on the floor.

The door of the dormitory was flung open, and a breathless Smith dashed to his bed and crawled into it.

“ Oh, my eye ! ” he said. “ What a lark, you fellows ! Banks and I went down the corridor that leads to the masters' quarters, and just as we turned into their wing, a door opened and a figure in white emerged. It looked pretty awful in the moonlight as it turned towards us. I don't know what Banks thought, but he trembled, and his knees knocked together. ‘ Save me, Smith,’ he cried and then he let out a yell fit to waken the seven sleepers. ‘ It's the ghost ; it's the ghost. See, it's got its head in its hand.’ I looked, but all I could see was old Limburger, the German master, carrying a candle ; but Banks was seeing things. He turned, and was off like a shot, just as Limburger saw us.

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“ ‘ *Ach, der Teufel !* ’ he yelled, and dived back into his room before I could move. I ran to his door, and I could positively hear him shaking in his slippers. I would have liked to cheer him up a bit, but I hadn’t time, so all I did was to make one or two hearty groans outside the door, and in less than no time Limburger was saying his prayers. He *was* in a state of funk. Then I cut back. ‘Sh. Here’s someone coming.’ ”

The sound of bare feet accompanied by slippers neared the room, the door opened and Banks came in, followed by the gym. master.

“ It’s all right,” the master was saying ; “ it is not a ghost, or anything like that ; merely a stray dog baying. M. Le Blanc was startled by one earlier in the evening. Go back to your bed at once, and the rest of you get off to sleep. I won’t report your escapade this time, as you seem to have had a bad fright, but next time you fancy a ghost-hunt, take care that you don’t indulge it.”

Banks crept into bed, feeling very unhappy.

“ Say, Banks, old man, where’s the ghost’s head,” cooed Hardman, as soon as the master had gone. There was no answer.

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“ We all thought you had gone to collect a new patent night-light to put on the top of the wardrobe. Where is it ? ”

“ Oh, shut up ! ” said the heroic one, disgustedly. “ It’s all very well for you fellows to laugh, but if you’d seen it you would have sung a different tune. I tell you I never saw anything so horrible in my life.”

“ Old Limburger would be pleased to hear you talking like that.”

“ Old Limburger ? What’s he got to do with it ? ”

“ Why, he was the ghost. Didn’t Smith tell you ? Why, Smith followed the ‘ ghost ’ to its room and it was only the German master. Of course you were not afraid of it. You wanted to see a ghost and take its head. You—— ”

The tormentor never finished. Banks, feeling like a pricked football, saw there was only one thing for it. He hid his head under the clothes and refused to listen to any more. One by one the other boys followed suit, and peace reigned in the school once more.

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CHAPTER XI.

MORE TROUBLE THROUGH TIGER.

“ Biggar ! ”

The whisper in the early morning failed to rouse Biggar, who slumbered on, dreaming uneasily of his lost sausage rolls.

“ Biggar ! ”

A little louder, and accompanied by a gentle push. Still no response. Clay became annoyed, yet he dared not resort to desperate measures, for fear of arousing the other sleeping boys.

“ Biggar ! I say, come on, wake up.”

This time the shaking drew forth a grunt and Clay increased his efforts.

“ Hello ! What’s the matter ? ”

“ Don’t make such a howling row, Biggar. It’s five o’clock.”

“ Well, it’s not time to get up yet.”

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Biggar promptly settled himself down for another sleep.

"Come on, lazy. We've got to track those burglars down before the other fellows get up."

"I don't want any of your silly old burglars," came the drowsy tones of the sleepy one.

"But, I say, you know, we've got Tiger to go and track them. The bloodhound, you know. Come on."

Clay pulled Biggar's nose, and dodged back to escape a blow. His trick, however, had the desired effect. Biggar was properly roused now.

"I'll teach you to start your monkey tricks at this time of the morning," he said, crossly, trying, at the same time, to rub the sleep from his eyes. "You think because your own guilty conscience won't let you sleep you must carry on like a howling dervish and waken everybody up. Wait a bit, my son, and I'll teach you."

"Don't be an ass, Biggar, and pull yourself together. Have you forgotten that we are going burglar-hunting? It's time we got a move on, if we are going to be out before the other fellows wake up. Give Smith a shake."

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Biggar responded, and in record time Smith was inquiring what idiot had broken into the dormitory. He showed no enthusiasm for the hunt, although Clay painted the picture in the most glowing colours.

"I don't want your stupid burglars," he said. "Go and find them yourself."

"All right," said Clay, considerably annoyed. "You can stop in bed, if you like. Biggar and I will go off by ourselves, and you'll jolly well get none of the reward. Will he, Biggar?"

"Not a cent," replied Biggar, though with little enthusiasm. "We'll bag the lot between us, and Smith will feel jolly fed-up when he sees us going about with our pockets full of money."

"Oh, all right, I'll come. Just give me time to get my things on."

Five minutes later three silent figures crept to the study where Tiger was a prisoner.

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" gasped Clay, on opening the door. "What a mess the place is in."

The other two were held almost speechless at the sight. Tiger was evidently a dog fond of creature comforts. The hard floor offered

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no inducement to him. Probably he thought a dog of his distinguished breed was worthy a better couch, especially after his efforts of the night ; and then a diet of sausage rolls and things did not tend to make him more restful. In his efforts to secure greater comfort he had dragged all the clothes off the hooks, with disastrous results to the clothes.

Biggar raved as he beheld his favourite blazer, the pride of the school, because of its daring colour scheme, reduced to a crumpled mass of tatters, and Smith joined him, when he discovered that Tiger had regarded his cricket shoes as possessing medicinal properties, and had half-consumed one before deciding they were not eatable.

The one cushion the room boasted had suffered from a violent internal disturbance that had reduced it to a complete wreck, while the whole study gave the impression that it had been visited by a cyclone. Fragments of the lamented sausage rolls were scattered about the floor, and in the midst of it all Tiger rose to his feet to welcome the boys with violent affection. The dog had no doubt in his own mind that Clay's face would do with a licking and, in an excess of joy, he sprang

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towards that youth with a short bark of welcome. In alarm, Clay stepped back on to the tender toes of Biggar, and as Tiger reached them at that moment, the two boys went down. Smith, to his amazement, was promptly given a realistic representation of a living volcano that erupted grunts and flailing arms and legs.

"Pull him off, you ass!" yelled Clay, getting his head free of the tangle for a moment. "You stand there grinning like a Cheshire cat while we may be killed. Ouch, you brute."

Tiger cut the words short by a vigorous application of tongue to the boy's face. The dog, supremely happy, entered into the new game with spirit, and Biggar grunted as a wagging tail struck him athwart the nose.

"You lunatic!" he yelled to the laughing Smith. "Give a hand here and stop that idiotic laughter. It isn't funny."

Only the need for haste spurred Smith to interfere, and two very dishevelled boys were presently standing up, holding the exuberant Tiger in one place by main force.

"Now we've got to get him out and lay him on the trail of the criminals," grunted

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Clay, keeping to the purpose of their early rising.

"How are we going to do it?"

"Through the window, of course, the same way as we got him in."

Tiger decided to take a rest.

"Come on, good dog," said Biggar.

"Now, old boy, through you go."

Tiger barked, but made no effort to comply.

"Come on, you brute, hurry up. We don't want to be here all the morning."

Still no response. Tiger sniffed at the window and was tempted for a moment by the vision of freedom beyond. Still, he had not done so badly in the study, and the morning air had a distinct chill about it. Then, too, he was just a little tired after his midnight efforts to add to the gaiety of the school. No! On second thoughts, he would stay where he was. He tried to turn back into the room.

"No, you don't," said Clay. "You've jolly well got to go through that window and track those burglars down, and the sooner you get busy the better it will be. Come on, you two, help me shove him out."

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The united efforts of the boys served only to make them hot and angry.

"It's no use; we can't move him that way," said Biggar, at length. "I know. You two push behind, while I go out on the roof and pull. We ought to be able to make him go then."

Without waiting for a reply, Biggar climbed through the window and stood up, uncertainly, on the slanting roof, with his back to the window. Tiger decided to follow and, having made up his mind, he stayed not on the order of his going. A floundering jump landed him on the roof, and on top of the tottering Biggar. With a yell from the boy, the two rolled down the roof and, in the end, a yelp of pain from the dog announced that they had landed safely below. It was not a dangerous fall, and Biggar saved himself by dropping on top of the dog. Biggar began to say what he really thought of the whole business, as the others joined him, but was silenced.

"You got him out; what more do you want?" said Clay. "Come on. Now for the giddy old trail and fortune."

Once outside, Tiger showed unusual

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activity, laid a trail for the dog-kennel, and ambled off in that direction with the boys hanging on to his chain and dragging in his wake. The dog wanted to go into the kennel, but Clay interposed his body, and he was persuaded to change his mind.

"Seek 'em. Good dog, seek 'em," urged Biggar.

Tiger sat down to think, and then began to sniff around. All of a sudden he discovered something, and set off at a pace that took Smith by surprise, and knocked him off his feet. His fall involved Biggar, and the two spoke feelingly about "clumsy brutes" when they regained an upright position, and got control once more of the impetuous animal.

"By Jove! he's found something!" gasped the panting Clay. "Frightfully keen on it, too."

"I'll bet we have those burglars tracked down in less than no time," agreed Biggar, with his first smile of the morning. "He's making straight for the Head's house."

"What's that?" Smith pointed to a running figure in white that flashed along a side path and disappeared in the direction of the kitchen garden.

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“Gee, it’s O’Mara ! I wonder what he’s up to ? ” said Clay.

Further conjecture was cut short. Tiger had seen the figure and he determined to investigate. He set off suddenly, and this time the boys were caught napping completely. Biggar made a frantic effort to keep his hold on the chain, tripped, and came down under the feet of the other two, who promptly fell on him. There they lay, as Tiger tore round the corner at top speed.

“We’ve done it now, you chaps,” said Clay, dismally. “I hope that dog does not do any damage. They’re awfully fierce when they are on the trail. We’ve got to get after him as fast as we can.”

“I wish I’d never seen the dog,” grunted Smith ; but he set off at a run with the others.

The Head at Whitegate was given to early rising, and on this particular morning he had excelled himself. He was filling his lungs with great breaths of the morning air when the white-clad O’Mara flashed across his view and disappeared from sight round the corner.

“That’s the spirit,” said the Head to himself. “There is the will to excel driving that boy out to exercise so early in the morning.

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I wonder who that boy is? I must find out and commend his example to the rest of the school. I—— What in the world is that? ”

The Head might well ask. From the direction of the fowlhouse came the sound of strife, of domestic hens and cocks in torment, followed by the baying of a hound and a yelp of pain. It took a great deal to startle the Head, but that noise did, and he set off at a run to find out what it was about. He turned the corner to find O'Mara standing in an attitude of defence, with a stick in his hands, while a huge, strange dog was chasing the poultry about the yard.

“ What is the meaning of this outrageous conduct, boy? ”

“ I don't really know, sir.”

“ Call that dog off at once; he's killing my hens.”

“ I can't, sir; I do not know it. I was having a run when it attacked me.”

“ Come here, sir.” The Head spoke sharply to Tiger, who at once retreated with a fluttering chicken in his jaws. Here was an impasse. It was just then that the three sleuths burst on to the scene.

"Here, Tiger ; good dog !" called Clay, and Tiger hastened to respond.

"Thanks for catching him. Now perhaps you will tell me what you know about this business."

The words, spoken quietly by the Head, made the detectives jump. They had been in such a hurry to catch Tiger they had not seen the Head. None of the three volunteered any information.

"Come, sir ; I am waiting to hear your explanation."

"I—I—sir," stammered Clay, without getting any further.

"Come, sir. Do not attempt to prevaricate. You three boys are evidently responsible for that dog being here. I want to know how it is you have broken a rule of the school by bringing a strange animal here without my permission, and, further, how it is that you let it run wild, killing my chickens ?"

"It—it was the burglar," stammered the unhappy Clay.

"The burglars ? What are you talking about, boy ? Have you taken leave of your senses ?"

"Well, sir, it was like this," cut in Biggar,

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with a rush of words. "We three determined to catch the burglars and borrowed Tiger, who is a bloodhound, to put him on the trail."

"Bloodhound! Nonsense, boy. Tiger, as you call him, is not at all like the noble animal you take him for. Someone has been having a joke with you. Still, continue."

"We were following the trail when he saw someone running, and dragged the chain out of our hands before we were ready. We are sorry he's killed some of the chickens, sir."

"Well, you boys have broken the rule of the school, but in view of the motive, I will overlook that this time. However, there are three dead chickens to account for and, of course, you must pay for them. It will teach you not to introduce strange dogs here and let them run about as they wish. I will tell the housekeeper to see that your pocket-money is devoted towards replacing the dead poultry. You may go."

Dispirited, dismayed at the prospect of no pocket-money for some time to come, with their funds perilously low after paying for the hire of the dog, three miserable boys seized the chain and returned Tiger to his owner.

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"No more burglar-hunting for me," said Clay, dismally.

"Nor for me," said Smith. Biggar was made of different stuff.

"Oh, I don't know. If you two are giving it up, I'm not. I shall have a cut at it myself."

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CHAPTER XII.

A LEAP TO DEATH.

“ Oh, is that you, O’Mara? You don’t mind me sending for you, but I was anxious to know how it is I never see you on the cricket field. I hope you are not going to be a slacker, like some of the boys here. You don’t turn up much, and then it is only to look on. How is it? ”

The term was a month old when Raikes sent for O’Mara and put the question to him.

“ Merely because I do not play cricket or such games, and then I have no desire to play here; the boys have peculiar ideas that are not at all in keeping with my own.”

“ I should be sorry to think you are a snob, O’Mara; yet you seem to wish me to believe that. Surely there are some games you go in for? ”

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“None that are played at the school. I devote my leisure to my own pursuits, and I assure you I much prefer that.”

“I can’t understand your point of view, O’Mara. Frankly, you are a puzzle to me. You are healthy, have a good figure, every promise of making a fine athlete, and yet you prefer to spend your time poring over some book or chess-board. It’s a mystery to me. I am told you go out training early every morning. Surely you have some object in that?”

“I have; but it is not one that concerns the school. It is a private one; but at least I can assure you it is not with the idea of so perfecting myself at some of the games played here that I can take a ‘pot’ in competition with the other boys in the school. I have no ambitions in that direction. Mere pot-hunting is vulgar.”

A shade of annoyance passed over Raikes’ face at the words, but he kept a perfect control over himself.

“You must, of course, please yourself, until such time as games are made compulsory, and I am hoping that day is not very far off. I certainly hope you will alter your point of

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view and that I shall see you in the cricket field. I am quite prepared to give you any help that I can."

"Sorry, Raikes, but I must decline. Cricket hardly appeals to me, you see."

"It's a pity. I am very anxious to make Burwell's house shine in the school sports this summer. They have been a great deal behind in recent terms, and I am trying my hardest to change that. There has been a waking up, and all the fellows are keen to do well. I want every boy to do something, and of those who are capable you are the only one who is standing out. I have seen you in the water, and think you could easily beat any of the juniors here, and most of the seniors, too, for the matter of that. Are you going to enter for any of the swimming events?"

"No." The reply was low. O'Mara loved swimming, and was tempted to pit himself against the rest of the form, but his peculiar views as to pot-hunting made him shake his head. "No," he repeated; "I would prefer not. I have a rooted objection to swimming for prizes."

"Well, I'm sorry, O'Mara. I really think you could pick up a good many points for

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the house, if you'd only try ; but I will not put any pressure on you."

Without another word O'Mara turned and left the room.

" Well ? " The captain put the question to Scott.

" Hopeless, Raikes, absolutely hopeless, and you know it, too. There is no evil in the boy, but he's got no further during the month he's been here than he did in the first two days. He still has the high-and-mighty, don't-touch-me, don't-speak-to-me attitude, and his silly training won't let him do a thing. He cuts every game, and generally loaf about with his books and his chessmen. If I were you, Raikes, I'd give him up. Tell Trueman frankly, he's more than difficult, he's hopeless, and leave it at that."

" I feel inclined to, sometimes," said Raikes, thoughtfully ; " but every time I do I feel there is something in the kid, something that just needs bringing out, and will make him a credit to the school. He's got the spirit, but his peculiar opinions are just ruining him. No, I don't think I'll give up. Somehow, I have a hunch that we'll see him hitting centuries for the school yet."

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"Well, I envy you your vision. All I can see is a kid who ought to be kicked, and have some of the nonsense knocked out of him that way. As it is, he simply joys in having been sent to Coventry, while any normal boy would be fighting hard to get back into favour with the rest of the school."

O'Mara strolled about, with the little devil, doubt, hard at work in him. There were boys playing cricket with evident enjoyment. Nor, too, did there seem to be anything so terrible in the game. Could it be that his aunt was all wrong and that it was quite correct to play such violent games? For a moment he doubted, but his faith in his aunt was the greatest thing in him. She had looked after him and had taken a pride in his deportment. He would not disappoint her for the world. Still, she might be wrong. He certainly felt an occasional desire to join in the games of the other boys, to run and jump, yell like a madman, and generally act like a noisy Arab—for such was how he regarded the enthusiasm of the rest of the form in their play. The summer was in his veins, and every heart-beat carried the desire to physical activity.

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His aunt had told him no gentleman ever lost his dignity. She had been rather insistent on that. How could he join in the games and still be dignified? Yet the merry shouts of the boys and the sun shining on the green fields called him with a power that hurt. For his aunt's sake he must turn a deaf ear, although it was with a pang, and he sought consolation in the thought that, if a thing was worth anything, it was worth a small sacrifice. His spirit should have gone forth into the green fields to rejoice; instead, he repressed it as a thing to be killed, and, as a consequence, he turned morose and moody.

The silence forced upon him by being sent to Coventry had become habitual. He seldom spoke a word, save in class, and he found all his pleasure in his own company. He stood there, a pathetic, even a tragic, figure, silent and alone, shunned by the rest of the school, and denying light to the seeds within him that were intended to grow and breed friendships that would live for the rest of his life. His spirit was stunted, and there was danger that his life would suffer the same fate.

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Entirely out of humour with himself, Harry walked up the cliffs. He had intended to bathe, but it was a hot day, and he found the sea full of laughing boys, so he put off his swim until the evening, and set off up the cliffs to think things over a bit.

Whitegate possessed a delightful bathing place, a pear-shaped bay, with the opening to the sea beyond. At one end it was shut in by high cliffs that towered straight up from the water's edge, but on the other side a shelving beach, with a strip of golden sands, formed an ideal spot for a dip. The boys were forbidden to go near the cliffs when in the water, for there was a grave danger there. In the countless ages the sea had worn a tunnel through the rock, and, as the tide ebbed the water swirled through this and reached the sea again, after a journey of over a mile under the ground.

The current swept like a mill-race, swinging along the foot of the cliffs and disappearing, apparently, into solid rock. At low tide it was possible to see the top of the arch, but at other times it was covered with water, and only evil-looking whirlpools marked the spot. No one had ever dared explore the tunnel,

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for report had it that no living thing had ever gone in and come out alive.

Above the swirling current the cliff rose to a height of seventy feet. Here Harry settled himself down with a book. The story gripped him, and he became so absorbed in it that he forgot where he was. His thoughts were far away with the hero of the tale, when he was awakened to himself by the confused sound of many voices, all shouting at once. What they cried he could not make out, but there was something wrong. He was irritated as he glanced towards the bathing-pool. Most of the boys had left the water, and they were all running to a point where the cliffs began, a quarter of a mile along the beach. They were calling words that he could not make out, to someone in the water. Harry's eyes went out to the bay, and his heart gave a jump as he saw the cause of the disturbance.

Down below, three hundred yards to the left of where he lay, a boy battled in the grip of the relentless current. He was swimming gallantly, but every moment saw him carried nearer the spot where sheer rock took the place of sand. The swimmer made one last tremendous effort as Harry watched, then

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threw up his hands and appeared to resign himself to his fate. He was in the grip of a force too great to be withstood, even by the most powerful swimmer, and his efforts to escape had exhausted him. For a moment he sank from sight and then lay passive on the water, letting the current carry him where it would.

Without knowing what he was doing, Harry sprang to his feet and peeled off his coat. Light gym. shoes were easily discarded, and, without a pause, his slim body was falling through the air to the water below. He never stopped to think—no O'Mara ever did—when it came to a question of action. He knew the danger of the racing waters, as every boy in the school did ; he knew that the chance of coming out alive was about a thousand to one ; but he knew, too, that a human being was being carried to certain death, and the spirit of the O'Maras forced him to action.

Cold reason would have told him of the futility of his leap. The action of the water had worn the rock as smooth as the palm of his hand, and there was not the least crack or jutting rock he could hope to seize and so save himself and the boy in the water. The

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angry whirlpools were but a little way ahead, grim sentinels at the portals of death ; but Harry heeded them not.

All he saw was a boy in need of help, and that was enough. He jumped ; almost before he knew it he was in the water, going down until it seemed as though he would never stop. At last he was rising, and a few powerful strokes took him to the side of the helpless boy.

“ Keep quiet,” he commanded sharply, as he began the herculean task of rescue. His only hope was that he might find a niche where he could cling. Ah, there was one, the merest crack, but it afforded hope. Exerting every nerve he strove, foot by foot, towards the side, and at last he was holding on to the niche with one hand while, with the other, he fought the tearing current for possession of Biggar Minor—he had recognised the boy as soon as he reached him.

“ For God’s sake hold on ! They’ve gone for ropes.” The cry came from above, and Harry looked up, to see the brink of the cliff lined by boys.

“ Hurry,” he cried, as the sea gave a harder tug at his legs and almost tore Biggar from

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his grasp. Would the rescue come in time? Already his fingers were numb under the strain. Every moment threatened to see him torn from his hold and carried to his death by a current that he could not hope to fight.

“Try and get your fingers in the crack,” he said to Biggar; but the boy was too far gone to heed. To Harry’s tortured brain it seemed he had been clinging to the rock for hours before the sight of a rope, long and sinuous, as it was lowered from the cliff, brought joy to his heart. Down it came, and then stopped. It was a foot short. Harry groaned in the agony of his spirit. Alone he could have reached it; but hampered by the burden of the semi-unconscious boy, he dare not attempt the leap.

“Get a longer rope!” he cried, and then his blood seemed to freeze in his veins as some object, submerged, but carried along by the current, hit him violently across the legs and tore his fingers from their hold. The rope dangled tantalisingly over his head. He must try to reach it. There was no other way, and failure meant death. Well, he would die, either way, and he might as well take the risk.

Flinging his arm free, of the rock, he

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grabbed. For one instant his fingers felt the rope, but they were too numb to act, and a cry of despair came from above as he was carried forward once more.

"Well, we seem to have done it this time," he said to Biggar. "We are heading for the tunnel and nothing on earth, or in the sky, can reach us now. If we were in the pictures I suppose an aeroplane would swoop down from nowhere and pick us up, but we are not in the pictures. We have got to face facts, and the main fact is that we are going to take a plunge and don't know when we'll come up again. That being so, take in as big a stock of air as you can."

Harry finished with a laugh as though he would defy the fate that threatened. He faced the crisis with a grim smile, and the prospect did not appal him. There might be a fighting chance ahead, after they had taken the plunge, and he meant to be ready to take it. He must keep his head, that was all.

They were near the whirlpool now, and for a second Harry felt his first twinge of fear, as some unseen force gripped his legs and tried to draw him under the surface. In one blind, unreasoning moment, he started to

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fight, and then he remembered. To struggle was not only futile; it was madness. It would weaken him for the fight ahead. He became passive.

"Take all the breath you can," he shouted to Biggar. "This is where we go for the underground trip."

Himself, he took as deep a breath as he could and the next moment his head was drawn under water. Away on the top of the cliff white-faced boys watched the figures sucked down until the two were hidden from view.

There was a long silence on the cliff—the boys were appalled by the awfulness of the tragedy they had just witnessed—but it was broken at last by Raikes. His face was working with emotion, and his words were uttered in a husky voice.

"By heaven, Scott, he was a hero, after all. I knew it. But what an awful thing that it should be proved in such a way."

"The greatest hero that ever lived," agreed Scott, unashamed of the manly tear that trickled down his cheek. "He had not a fighting chance from the moment he jumped into the water. He faced certain death, and I know he faced it in a way that it is given to

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few to do—with a spirit that rose supreme in the last moments. Oh, the pity of it all ! ”

“ I suppose we had better go and break the news to the Doctor,” said Raikes ; “ it is no use our staying here, we can do nothing. Some of the boys had better keep watch, and others can cut across to where the current flows into the sea, and watch there.”

Raikes gave a few instructions, and he and Scott set off to face the Head.

“ You know, Scott, I feel almost like a criminal to be here and alive, after what has happened. I would much rather have gone and taken my chance with O’Mara.”

The Head paled when he heard the news ; but he was too great a man to indulge in petty recrimination. It was not for him to try and fix the blame then. That would be an unpleasant duty for a later day, and he would not flinch when that time came. For the moment he must act.

He heard and commended what Raikes had done, and offered one or two suggestions that might help.

“ I am afraid our only hope can be to recover the bodies of those poor boys before

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they are swept out to sea," he said. "I know the awful reputation of the place, and that nothing has ever come out of the tunnel alive. There may be a hope. Let us strive to cling to that as long as we can. What did you say was the name of the boy who jumped off the cliff to the rescue?"

"O'Mara—Harry O'Mara; son of Colonel O'Mara, V.C."

"A worthy son, indeed, of one who got his medal for leading a forlorn hope against impossible odds. I am inexpressibly shocked, Raikes. Please ask Mr. Trueman to step this way, and carry on with the search. Until that is finished the boys must do nothing else."

Under the direction of the Head, search-parties were sent out in charge of prefects and masters, in such a way that there was not an inch of the coast that was not patrolled; but as each report followed report, all of a negative character, hope grew fainter and fainter.

Raikes was distracted under the strain.

"I know," he said to Scott, as they returned to their study. "We will moor a boat at the entrance to the tunnel when the tide

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has gone down, and I will swim with the current as far as I can, in the hope of discovering something. It will be safe enough if I have a line tied round me. I must go, Scott, or I shall go mad."

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CHAPTER XIII.

A HERO AFTER ALL.

When he felt himself in the grip of the current, Harry, burdened as he was with the body of his almost unconscious schoolmate, gave himself up for lost. Strangely enough, he felt no fear. His mind was clear. He recognised that if there was a chance to escape it would come later, and for the present the only thing was to lie passive and allow the current to carry him where it willed. Down, down, down they went until it seemed that the awful suction would never end, and then suddenly they shot forward and were rising. The light that filtered through the opening was gone. It was too dark to distinguish even the sides of the tunnel. Instinctively, Harry put his arm above his head as they rose to the surface, and presently he felt it rubbing

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against the perfectly smooth roof of the tunnel.

How long that awful journey lasted Harry never knew. It seemed to be an æon. Under the strain his lungs threatened to burst, and red flashes of light shot across his eyes. There was a roaring noise in his ears, and he felt that, whatever happened, he must take a breath to relieve his tortured chest. Grimly he fought the impulse, in the knowledge that if he did so whatever chance there was of escaping would be gone, but his senses reeled under the strain. He told himself they had surely travelled miles without finding any alteration in the condition of the roof that kept their heads pressed down under the water—a trip in an inferno with never a ray of hope.

What was that? Yes, at last he could swear his hand was out of the water, and the roof rising. Yes, it was true! His whole arm was free now. With a joy in his heart he thrust his head up. Never did a human being draw a sweeter breath. The air was rank with the rotting vegetation of centuries; but to his tortured lungs it was a breath of life from the gods, and he filled his lungs in thankfulness. His next thought was for

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Biggar, and in a trice he had the boy's head above the water. Was he dead? For a moment Harry felt he must be, so still did he lie; but the effect of the air brought nervous twitchings that spoke of life. Harry was filled with joy, but he recognised that they were still far from being out of the wood. They were still going forward in an inky blackness, and he could only guess at what might lie ahead.

The roof had disappeared now. He flung his arm up to its full extent, but struck nothing solid. Even the festoon of seaweed that he had felt at first had gone, and he was filled with hope. There were perils ahead, but his spirit was strong in him. All the time he was struggling to make his way to the side, in the hope of being able to cling there until the tide had fallen, when his heart gave a great bound.

In the darkness he felt the current sweep them round a sharp corner, and there was light ahead. Yes, there was no mistaking it; yet Harry was puzzled. Surely it was not daylight? It was too yellow for that, and it was not steady enough. It flickered, and daylight never did that. What could it be?

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They were being carried rapidly towards it, and he redoubled his effort to reach the side. He could have shouted for joy as his feet touched the bottom and he was standing on a shelving beach in a great underground cavern with the light that had puzzled him shining from a hole a couple of feet above his head. Once clear of the water, he laid Biggar down and went off to investigate.

He found himself looking into an underground cave, such as were common in that part of the country ; but the amazing thing was that the cave was lit up by candles, by the light of which two men were examining something he could not see. His first impulse was to hail the men, but something, he knew not what, kept him silent. Instead, he watched, and his heart gave a bound as he caught sight of the things the men were looking at.

Those silver cups ! Surely he had seen them before ? Yes, he had it. He had seen them on the first day at the school, and they then reposed on the sideboard in the Head's room. How had they come there ? Harry thought rapidly. He did not know the men, and he had not had a chance to see their faces ; but, whatever their purpose in being

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there, it was an evil one, and things might happen if they caught him. Caution kept him silent. He must wait until they had gone. He went back and busied himself in restoring Biggar to consciousness. He had a full knowledge of how to render first-aid, and under treatment Biggar opened his eyes, just as the lights popped out and the sound of retreating footsteps came to Harry's ears.

Harry allowed the strangers ample time to get away, though every minute seemed an age, and then followed. He never paused in the chamber, but made his way cautiously along the passage beyond, half-carrying, half-dragging Biggar after him. His progress was slow, because he had to feel every foot of the way; but at last he was rewarded by seeing a glimmer of light ahead. The circle grew larger and larger as he neared it, until he could see that it was big enough for him to walk through.

The tunnel ended suddenly, and Harry found himself on the ledge of a wall. It took but a glance to tell him the passage had been made in the side of a well, and as he looked for a way out, his eyes lighted upon a number of nails, driven into the walls in such a way

that they would be hidden from above. Here was the stairway ; but it was not possible for him to get Biggar up there without help. He must leave his companion behind him and go to get help.

" Sorry, Biggar, old man," he said, once he had decided ; " but I've got to leave you here for a bit and go and get help. There is no more danger, though, and I'll make you as comfy as I can before I go. You are all right so long as you do not go prospecting and fall down the well that lies on the other side of the opening."

" Don't worry about me," Biggar managed to gasp. " I shall be all right until you come back. I shall not go falling down any wells, you can bet your life on that ; I've had quite enough water to last me a long time. Be as quick as you can."

Gingerly, Harry trusted himself to the first nail, to find it quite safe, and in a trice he was standing at the top of the well, taking his bearings. To his surprise, he found he was within hailing distance of the school. He had lost all sense of direction while under the ground, and had expected to find himself miles from anywhere. Actually, he was no

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more than four hundred yards from the school. He was about to set off at a run to bring help for Biggar when a rough voice accosted him, and a huge hand was placed on his shoulder.

“ Now then, my young shaver, what have you been up to down that well ? ”

Harry turned in a flash, to face the gardener's boy, Sam, a great lumbering youth of eighteen, who thrust an ugly face forward in a most unpleasant manner.

“ Come on, what have you been doing down the well ? I want to know.” There was an evil look in Sam's eyes, as he put the question.

“ Out of the way,” said Harry. “ You are stopping me ; and I am in a hurry.”

“ That's as it may be ; but you are not going from here until I know what you've been up to. You'd best be telling me, if you want to go on. If not, you'll come with me, and we'll see what father can make of you.”

Under normal circumstances, Harry would have gone with the boy, but the struggle and strain of the last few hours had told on him. Then, too, there was the need for haste. He made no reply, but acted.

“ Smack ! ” O'Mara's right fist shot out,

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travelled straight from the shoulder, and landed square on Sam's nose. Tom's lessons had evidently not been wasted.

"You little devil!" howled Sam. "Just you wait a minute. I'll half-kill you for that, see if I don't!"

Harry declined to wait. Before Sam had finished the threat a left followed the right, and then Harry, rising on to his toes, smashed downwards with the right. The blow was perfect, and landed just on that part of Sam's jaw where it would do the greatest amount of harm. The boy crumpled up and fell to the ground, and Harry ran off as fast as his legs would carry him.

* * * * *

"That's the idea. We'll moor the boat at the entrance to the tunnel and explore, as soon as the tide goes down."

Raikes was amplifying his scheme to Scott when the study door was suddenly flung open, and a wild, breathless figure burst into the room.

"O'Mara! By all that's wonderful, it's O'Mara. How in the world did you escape and get here?" cried Raikes, in ringing tones, as he and Scott sprang to their feet.

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"I have no time to explain now," gasped the panting boy. "Biggar is in danger, and you must come at once and rescue him. Come quickly, and get as many fellows as you can. I'll join you in the quad, as soon as I have seen the Head. Oh, don't stop to ask questions; I tell you it's serious," added Harry, in the knowledge that the boy he had knocked down would soon recover, and they must rescue Biggar before the men he had seen had time to be warned. Raikes and Scott felt some of his alarm, and as he dashed out of the room and raced along the corridor to the Head's study, they were already sending out a call for all the boys in the school to gather in the quad.

Harry did not wait to knock on the door of the Headmaster's study. He flung it open and dashed in.

"Merciful Heavens! Is that you, O'Mara!" gasped the Head. "We had given you up for dead. How——"

"Sorry, sir, but I've no time to talk now. Biggar is in danger. 'Phone for the police at once. It's the burglars."

"Biggar in danger! Burglars! Your experience has not driven you mad, I hope."

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"Was never more sane in my life," said Harry, shortly, and somewhat rudely. "'Phone for the police. I've found the burglars. If we don't hurry they'll find Biggar, and then there's no telling what will happen."

Mr. Trueman was on his feet and out of the room before Harry had finished. The boy's whole air carried conviction, and without another word the Head took up the 'phone.

"Tell them to send the police to the old well," shot Harry, as he followed in the wake of Mr. Trueman.

"Come on, you fellows," he cried, a moment later, to the waiting boys in the quad. "Sprint for the old well as hard as you can."

It was but a minute before they got in sight of the well, and Harry let out a warning yell as he saw the figures of two men racing towards it from the far side.

"There they are," he shouted, "and we've got to get to the well in time to stop them going down. Biggar is down there, and if they find him they'll kill him."

Every boy redoubled his efforts, and there ensued a race such as will never be seen again at Whitegate. Little Wiffins, phenomenally fleet of foot, headed the field in one tremendous

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dash. Would he get to the well first? He answered the question with another burst of speed, and before he realised it, he was at the well, a yard in advance of the men. He was a long way ahead of the rest of the school, and what he did then will be written down in the history of brave deeds at Whitegate.

They were two big men, and Wiffins had no illusion as to what would happen if he attacked, yet a fellow of the school was in peril, and at all costs he had to stop the brutes. There was only one way, and Wiffins took it.

With a shout, he flung himself at the feet of the leading man. It was a tackle no one could withstand, and the man came down, falling on top of the boy, and knocking every atom of breath out of his body.

With a deep curse the second man stopped to catch Wiffins, and he flung out a blood-curdling threat as he lifted the boy into the air and prepared to throw him down the well. The threat was not carried out. Before the villain could accomplish his purpose a hard fist caught him on the point of the jaw. Behind the fist was all the wrath that Mr. Trueman was capable of, and the man went down. The two of them—and the boys

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recognised one as the gardener—fought grimly for their freedom, but were borne to the ground and held there by sheer force of numbers.

Under Harry's guidance, Biggar was quickly rescued, and then a number of boys went down into the tunnel. Amazement was writ large on the faces of the onlookers as, one by one, their chums came back, bearing in their arms the proceeds of many burglaries that had puzzled the police.

The police arrived on the scene before the task was finished, and took charge of the two men and the valuables. The school watched with open mouths, and then, as the police marched off with their prisoners, the boys awakened to a realisation of what was happening.

O'Mara, shunned by all, sent to Coventry as a sneak, despised and cold-shouldered, had done this amazing thing. He had suddenly become their hero, and not only that, but a hero who would be talked about so long as the school existed. Cheer after cheer was sent up, led by Mr. Trueman, and then Harry felt himself caught by many hands. He tried to break free, but was hoisted aloft and

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marched in triumph to the school, while his heart overflowed with a new-found joy of companionship that it had never known before.

* * * *

"DEAR FATHER," there was pride in the heart of the old colonel as he read the letter—"You will doubtless have heard from the Head of what has happened at the school, and of the little part I played in it, and I have not the least doubt that what he has written is very much exaggerated. The Head gave me a lovely gold watch and, naturally, I am very proud of it. There is one thing, however, about which I would like to have your advice. During the affair, a lout of a boy tried to stop me. In the heat of the moment I am afraid I hit him on the nose. It has worried me a great deal since, to think that under any circumstances I can so far have forgotten my training as a gentleman. I have not mentioned the matter to anyone, save you, and I do so hope you will be able to assure me that what I did in the heat of the moment was justified—HARRY."

"DEAR HARRY," the colonel laughed softly to himself as he wrote the reply, and there was

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a song in his heart. " I have heard of the affair at the school, and am very, very proud of you. I will not say any more, lest I make you conceited. I enclose £1, not as a reward for your part in the rescue, but for punching that fellow on the nose. It will perhaps convey my opinion better than if I wrote a book on the subject."

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CHAPTER XIV.

DONKEY DROPS.

Anyone who had supposed that O'Mara's suddenly acquired popularity would mean an equally sudden change in his attitude towards the school, would have been mistaken. The deeply ingrained habits of a lifetime are not discarded with the facility that one doffs a cloak. Harry still remained reserved. True, he mingled more freely with the rest of the boys, yet it was some time before he could be induced to join in the school life with anything approaching abandon. Further lessons in discipline had to be learned before the change in him could be regarded as complete. The first lesson came a week after the excitement of the rescue of Biggar Minor and the capture of the burglars. Raikes started it, when he walked into the study O'Mara occupied.

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"Hello, Raikes!" cried Harry, with the nearest approach to enthusiasm he had shown since his arrival at Whitegate. "What's happening?"

"Nothing much, youngster," replied the captain. "I just dropped in to tell you that I have put your name down for Burwell 'D' Team, for the match with 'B' on Saturday."

"Thanks." O'Mara was just a trifle short in his comment. "But I am not so sure that I want to play. Cricket hasn't appealed to me, so far. Apart from swimming, and——" He broke off short. In a moment of forgetfulness he almost betrayed the secret he was keeping from the school, the secret of his visits to the village for the periodical boxing lessons at the hands of Tom Mason.

"And what?" smiled Raikes.

"Oh, nothing," replied Harry. "I was merely going to say that violent exercises do not appeal to me, because they tend towards periodical loss of dignity."

Raikes laughed. "How can you be sure?" he asked. "Especially as you have yet to give games a trial."

"Oh, I have watched the fellows at

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cricket. There was a case yesterday, when Spence was bowled as he tried to drive the ball out of the field. Why, the whole school laughed at him. He must have felt jolly uncomfortable at that moment."

"Yet he laughed himself," commented Raikes. "He made a silly stroke against a googly ball, and paid the penalty. That's half the fun of the game. Some day, perhaps, you'll see it for yourself. For the moment, I want you to promise that you will turn out."

"But I have never played before, and I don't know that I want to begin. As I say, cricket doesn't appeal to me."

"That's what you think in your ignorance. Give it a trial; turn out on Saturday. I hardly like to put it as I am going to do, but, turn out as a favour to me. Wait"—as O'Mara would have interrupted—"I admit that my motive is selfish. I believe you will make a good cricketer, and Whitegate, at the moment, wants fellows who can play the game. Now, do me a real favour and turn out."

"Oh, all right," said Harry, a trifle ungraciously, after a moment's thoughtful pause.

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"I'll turn out on Saturday, but I'm not promising that I shall take up the game."

"That's all right," laughed Raikes, happily. "You don't know yourself, youngster. I'm ready to wager that, once you have had a bat in your hand, you'll be as keen for cricket as anyone in the school. Saturday, then, at two-thirty." Smiling as one who had achieved something he had set his heart upon, Raikes departed. Left alone, Harry sat thoughtful for a period.

"It's a nuisance," he said at length. "I wish Raikes hadn't made it a personal matter. I rather like him, and, dash it all, no gentleman can refuse to do a fellow a favour when it lies in his power. All the same, it's a nuisance."

With a sigh he took out his chessmen and, setting the pieces out on the board, started to work out intricate problems. Raikes, for his part, went back to his own study, where Scott was waiting for him.

"Well?" Adam put the question.

"I got him to promise to turn out," smiled Raikes. "He didn't want to do so, but I persuaded him."

"I don't know why you take so much trouble over the kid," grunted Scott. "I

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know he's got a lot in him, deep down in his nature, but—well, it's rather a thankless job, trying to force a kid into doing something he ought to be keen upon."

"I'll tell you," replied Raikes, with a laugh, "and in the telling will make a prophecy. Some day, and before very long, O'Mara is going to play for the school team, and the whole school is going to cheer him as one of the best batsmen we have ever had. Look here, Adam, if ever there was a fellow physically cut out for cricket, it's O'Mara. He's got a cricketer's eye, if anyone ever had, with the strength and pluck to back it up."

"Well, for your sake I hope you are right," grinned Scott. "Personally, I doubt it. I'm with you in one thing. There is a lot about the youngster that I like, but, beyond a certain point—well, I get out of patience with him. If it hadn't been for old Trueman, I should have dropped him as hopeless."

"That's what I don't mean to do with a single kid in the school," said Raikes, solemnly. "To me, a captain of any school has a big responsibility in trying to bring out the best that is in all the youngsters in the school. I'm out to do that. As far as I can, I have

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to try and leave Whitegate better than I found it."

"You are a solemn old owl, Raikes," laughed Scott. "Of course you are right, but at times Whitegate becomes a fetish with you. I never knew such an enthusiast in my life."

"Enthusiasm is the only thing worth while," laughed Raikes. "If you haven't got that in everything you tackle, you'll never make a success of it. The world is full of men who are failures, not because they lack ability, but because they haven't the enthusiasm needed to bring out their ability. They are content to run jobs efficiently, and lack of enthusiasm blinds them to the fact that the only way to run a job is to do it better than anyone has ever done it before. But, great Scot, man! you've started me preaching, and I don't want to do that. Come on, the sun is shining, and the sea calls."

Having given his promise, O'Mara had not the least idea of departing from his word. Such a thing never entered his head. With an O'Mara, once a promise was made, it had to be kept. All the same, he regarded the whole business as a nuisance, and hated the thought

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that, by some blunder while the game was in progress, he might make himself, even for a moment, the laughing-stock of the school. He had watched games, and knew from personal observation that his schoolfellows had little mercy on blunders. The boys of Whitegate were equally prodigal with cheers and jeers. A writer of fiction might be tempted, at this stage, to make his hero an immediate success at the great national game ; but as this is a record of fact, it has to be written down that Harry O'Mara was far from being that, and to him the Saturday following the visit of Raikes was a most miserable day.

The match for which his name had been entered was important in the sense that it was one of the preliminaries for the school championship. Not that Burwell " D " had the least prospect of capturing the honour. Every house entered as many teams as possible, matches were played on the knock-out principle, and defeated sides had no further interest in the tournament. A further development of the championship idea laid it down that any players doing well in inter-house games, should be included in the eleven

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that finally represented the house. Burwell ran four teams, and with forty-four active cricketers, it followed that the fight for a place in the final house team was really keen. The game between Burwell "D" and "B" teams inaugurated the tournament series, and the school assembled in force to enjoy themselves. "B" team was composed of possibles, and "D" of "last-hoppers." Biggar Major won the toss for innings for Burwell "B," and O'Mara found himself disposed by his captain to field on the boundary. He was not alone on the fringe of the sward. Biggar Major elected to open the innings himself, and it was significant that, as the senior walked to the wicket, Clay, who captained "D" team, put several men on the boundary. Biggar, in form, was noted as a mighty hitter.

"Play!" Raikes, acting as umpire, gave the signal, and Clay, taking a mighty run, sent down what he fondly imagined was an unplayable express.

"Bang!" There was no mistake as to what happened. Biggar met the ball with the full force of the bat, plus all the force he was capable of.

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“Look out, O’Mara!” Excited juniors round the ground raised the call. The batsman had got a little too much under the ball and skied it in a mighty hit that sent it soaring towards the boundary, and directly toward where O’Mara was standing. To a boy reasonably safe with his hands, it was a perfectly simple catch. There was no possibility of being unsighted, the sun was behind his back, and there was not the least need to run in order to get under the ball. In short, it was a catch such as no one had the least excuse for missing, yet Harry achieved that. He knew perfectly well what was expected of him, and made ready.

“Hold it, O’Mara!” cried Raikes. “Hold it.”

Harry meant to hold it. The spirit was quite willing, but he found that the execution was weak. Down the ball came, right into his waiting hands, and the sting of it so surprised him he promptly allowed the ball to fall to the ground. It passed through his hands as though they had not been there. From round the ring came a groan of dismay, while at the wicket Biggar grinned hugely at the “life.”

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"Give him a bag!" Unfeeling juniors raised the call. "Give him a bag. Butter fingers!"

Uncomplimentary remarks were flung at the fielder, and O'Mara flushed angrily.

"Well tried, O'Mara," called Raikes, in an effort to counter the effect of the jeers on the sensitive nature of the boy.

"Well tried!" grunted Clay, in tones that could be heard by all the players. "Rotten, I call it. An absolute sitter, and he must go and put it on the grass. Any kid in a junior form should have made the catch. Got a chance to get Biggar out with the first ball of the match, and get let down like that. It's enough to make a fellow give the game up. Now goodness only knows how many runs Biggar will make."

Clay was in a mood of black pessimism at the moment, and his feelings were no happier ten minutes later, by which time Biggar, by way of celebrating his escape, had flogged the bowling to the tune of twenty-five runs. Always hot-tempered, Clay flung the ball down at the end of a disastrous over, from which Biggar had collected two sixes and a four, and signalled to O'Mara.

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"Come on and try and get him out," he grunted. "But for you we'd have had half the side out by now. Come and have a cut at him."

"I don't know if I can bowl," said Harry, his face an angry red at the taunting words.

"Well, you can try," snapped Clay. "You are absolutely no good in the field and, after all, Biggar might sky one of your balls and be caught."

To Harry it was one of the most uncomfortable moments of his school life. He had a feeling that Clay had dragged him into the limelight in a fit of pique and with the deliberate intention of holding him up to the ridicule of the school. Harry had a theoretical knowledge of bowling, in the sense that he knew how a ball should be bowled, but he had never progressed beyond that stage. When he took the ball from Clay, it was to send down the first ball he had ever delivered in cricket, and his effort sent the school into roars of laughter.

Emulating Clay, he took a long run, tore down to the wicket at top speed, got his feet into a tangle at the moment of delivery, and instead of sending down what he had intended

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should be a good length ball of speed, presented Biggar with what the school promptly named a "donkey drop." The ball rose into the air from his hand, came down in mid-wicket, and trickled in the direction of the stumps Biggar was defending. With a glad cry at what the gods had offered, the hitter jumped out of his crease, with the intention of smiting the ball into the next county, and then there was a roar of delight from the school. In his determination to make a record hit, Biggar threw the whole of his energy into his stroke, and missed. No one ever knew how he came to do that unaccountable thing, but the ball seemed to be deflected from its true course by a heel print in the crease. It broke a couple of feet wide of the wicket, and Biggar missed it. Nor was that the end. Meeting only with the air when he had expected to feel the satisfying impact of a ball, Biggar lost his balance, and his bat swinging round, he stumbled and almost fell. Probably the most surprised player on the field was Banks, keeping wicket for "D" team; but he did not lose his head in his excitement. Here was a glorious opportunity, and he seized it with both hands.

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“Howzatt?”

He sent out a gleeful howl, as he grabbed the ball and broke the wicket. There was no doubt as to the verdict. Biggar had taken two strides out of his crease, and when Banks broke the wicket, was a good yard outside.

“Out!” Raikes grinned widely as he gave his decision.

“Out! Ye gods and little fishes!” grunted Biggar, as he ruefully regarded the broken wicket. “Out, and to the worst ball ever bowled on the ground.”

“Just so, my son,” grinned Raikes; “but none the less out.”

“Well, I’m jiggered!” gasped Clay. “I’m—ha, ha, ha! My goodness, what a ball to take a wicket!”

It was too much. Clay collapsed into a heap on the grass, there to laugh until his sides ached. Nor was he alone. From round the field came the loud guffaws of delighted boys, and little Phelps, the school poet, seized the inspiration of a moment, and started on a poem that was to make the ball that got Biggar’s wicket famous in the school for years to come.

“Look out, Chester!” came the call

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from the spectators, as the next batsman came out. "Watch for the donkey drops."

Chester grinned as he took his centre and waited. If O'Mara sent down another ball like that one, he knew perfectly well what he would do with it, and his eye measured the distance between the wicket and the pavilion. Once, Raikes had sent a ball clean over the pavilion, a feat duly entered in the annals of Whitegate cricket, and Chester had an idea that he would equal it, if fate offered him another of the "donkey drops." He did ; but not from a ball similar to the one that had taken his captain's wicket.

Boiling inwardly at the jeering laughter, O'Mara determined to be more careful. He would not attempt to get mere speed this time, but would make more certain of control. Over his arm went in a slow, easy motion, and down the ball went, a slow, full toss, that simply shrieked to be hit. Chester hit it. There was not the least doubt about that part. He could not very well miss. All he had to do was to stand still and swing his bat, and he did that with all the energy he could command.

"Crack !" Away soared the ball. Away

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on the boundary Smith turned his back to the wicket as the ball swished high over his head, and followed it with his eyes. It seemed as though that ball would never stop.

“O-o-o!” came from the ring in admiration of a mighty hit, and the next moment there came a tremendous cheer as the ball cleared the roof of the pavilion and disappeared from view. Raikes’ mighty hit had been equalled.

“Well hit!” cried the school captain, in ungrudging admiration. “Oh, well hit, Chester!” Then he turned to O’Mara. “Try to drop the ball a foot or so in front of the bat,” he advised. “Just bowl at a natural speed, but make certain of your length.”

Harry grunted angrily. He felt, at that moment, that he was the butt of the school, and his temper got the better of him.

“See if you’ll put this one over the pavilion,” he grunted, as he turned to measure off his run. Bounding down to the wicket again, he put the whole of his energy into his next delivery. How he achieved it he never knew; but fate decreed that he should send down a ball of perfect length, and straight. Fate also decreed that the ball should be

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a shooter. It was just as much a freak ball as the first one had been. Chester, expecting something entirely different, estimating the bowling of O'Mara as a joke, was unprepared. Too late, he realised that he had a difficult ball to play. In a flash he had to decide whether to step out or play back, and he played back, stepped hastily back and promptly trod upon his wicket.

"Howzatt?"

Again Banks sent out the gleeful call, and again Raikes' reply was prompt and unhesitating.

"Out!"

From the ring came a gasp of dismay, then a mighty cheer, mingled with joyous laughter. This was too good to be missed. Even the most ignorant realised that O'Mara could not in any sense be called a bowler, yet he had taken two wickets, and more, wickets of men who were automatic selections for the first eleven for the school.

"Play up, O'Mara," came the cry, as Scott came out to fill the vacancy at the wicket. "Mix 'em a bit more, mix 'em."

There is no need to tell in further detail the history of that amazing over. Save for

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the ball that beat Chester, every delivery Harry sent down shrieked to be hit. Scott hit three in succession, one a no-ball for a glorious six, and then failed to get under the next and was caught on the boundary.

Later the record of the over was written out and placed on the school notice board, thus : O'Mara—overs, 1 ; maidens, 0 ; runs, 22 ; wickets, 3.

O'Mara bowled two no-balls and one wide.

"Of all the freak overs that was ever bowled," grunted Clay, "that one simply takes the biscuit; but I don't think I'll keep O'Mara on any longer. It's too good to last."

The last of "B" wickets fell at 123, an hour-and-a-half after the innings had opened.

"Any good as a batsman?" asked Clay of O'Mara as they went into the pavilion.

"Never played before," grunted Harry, a little angrily. "And I wish to goodness I had never played this time. All the fellows laughing at me."

"Let 'em laugh," replied Clay. "Your over might have been a funny one, and you must admit that it was, but you got three wickets, and came out with the best average of the afternoon. What more do you want?"

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"Nothing more than for this game to end," grunted Harry. "It's the first and the last time I ever play cricket. I'm not in the least good at it."

It did not help matters that certain juniors should indulge in a little fun-making at Harry's expense. Little Whibley, and Chalmers of the Third, staged an exaggerated reproduction of the singular over.

"Howzatt?" Whibley sent down the most outrageous wide, and made the appeal. Chalmers, with a bat in his hand, promptly looked surprised and walked backward until his wicket lay prone under his feet. Harry at that moment had to summon up all his ideals of a gentleman to prevent himself raging out of the pavilion to the spot where the jokers held forth, there to wreak summary vengeance. It needed an effort, and a still greater effort was called for to enable him to raise a smile. But he managed it. He smiled, and when he had achieved so much, only a little more effort was needed to turn the smile into a chuckle. Presently he was laughing most heartily, and as he did so he found, to his surprise, that the antics of the youngsters lost all their sting. Unconsciously,

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he was learning the wisest dictum of this life—that the laughter of those holding you up to ridicule loses all its sting the moment you join in with it. Practical joking thrives on the annoyance of its victims. Let the victims show that they are impervious to the shafts of cutting wit and the shafts miss their mark.

“Wrong, kid,” cried Harry, after a time. “That wasn’t a proper donkey-drop. Let me show you.”

He proceeded to illustrate by sending down an exaggerated example of the freak ball that had taken Biggar’s wicket. Presently there was gathered behind the pavilion a crowd of laughing youngsters, with O’Mara in the centre, thoroughly enjoying themselves. Raikes saw out of the corner of his eye, and chuckled happily.

“That’s the spirit that is going to win,” he told himself. “After that, I feel that O’Mara is far, very far from being hopeless.”

Thanks to a great innings by Clay, Burwell “D” team made a surprisingly good show against the stronger “B” eleven, and with nine wickets down, they were within a round dozen of the total needed to give them the victory. Clay had carried his bat through

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the innings, and stood with his own total at sixty-three as O'Mara walked out to fill the vacant place and face the bowling of Biggar Major, a stiff task for a youngster making his first effort with a bat, for Biggar sent the ball down faster than anyone in the school. Biggar, indeed, would have been a great bowler, measured by any standard, but for the fact that he was apt to sacrifice accuracy for sheer speed when wickets did not fall as fast as he wished.

"Punch him over the pavilion," yelled excited juniors.

"He's far more likely to punch my stumps right across the ground," thought Harry ; but, none the less, he raised a smile. Clay walked out to meet him, and the captain was in a state of tremendous excitement.

"Whatever you do, try and keep your end up," he cautioned. "Don't try and hit him at all. Just block every ball. Keep your bat straight and your left elbow up, and he can't bowl you. Do that, and we've won the match. I can easily get a dozen off Scott's next over."

"I'll have a shot at it," grinned Harry ; "but don't blame me if I fail. A straight

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bat, and block every ball. I think I can do it."

"Good for you," said Clay.

Had it not been for the umpire, Harry would have disregarded the formality of taking his centre ; but he went through with that part of the business, and prepared himself to meet the attack with what he fondly imagined to be a straight bat.

"Watch me frighten him out," grinned Biggar, as he made ready to send down his fastest ball. "I'll get him first ball."

Flinging the whole of his energy into the effort, Biggar tore down to the wicket as though he were finishing a sprint, round flashed his arm, and away shot the ball, surely the fastest he had ever bowled. Harry gave a gasp. He had not had the experience to tell him that the ball should have produced a certain four. Pitched on the leg side, it needed but a touch to send it speeding to the boundary, clear of the field. He tried to meet it with a straight bat, and play it back to the bowler, got his legs in a tangle, and missed it completely. But the ball did not miss him.

"Thud !" The sound of the impact was

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heard all over the field, and Harry dropped his bat to collapse in a heap, gasping for breath. The ball, travelling like an express, hit him square in the ribs, knocking all the breath out of his body, and hurting him more than anything had ever hurt him before. He rolled over in his agony, and, in alarm, Raikes ran to him.

"Hurt, O'Mara?" asked the school captain, needlessly. "Better finish and go back to the pavilion; I'll come and look you over, and see that no damage is done."

"I'm—all—right!" gasped Harry, struggling to his feet, and gritting his teeth. "It isn't much. Get on with the game."

Rubbing his side, he picked up his bat and turned once more to face the demon bowler of the school. In that moment Harry's courage drove him on, and the fighting spirit of the O'Maras came to his aid. He forgot all about the issue hanging on his efforts. The affair became a personal duel between him and Biggar. Biggar had hurt him. Well, he'd show Biggar that he couldn't have matters all his own way. His teeth were closed tightly, and his chin thrust forward as he took his stance at the crease and waited. From round

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the ring came a genuine cheer for his pluck, and that cheer did him all the good in the world. Once again, Biggar was tearing down towards the wicket. There was no mercy in the bowler. He had to get O'Mara out. This time he was more careful. The speed of the ball was not so great, but the direction was better.

"Swish!" Watching the ball intently, Harry lifted his bat. He'd show Biggar something. With all the driving force of his powerful shoulder muscles, he struck.

"Crack!" Bat met ball fairly and squarely. Biggar made a frantic leap as something shot over his head, but was a split second too late, and the ball was speeding to the boundary. There was no need to run. It was obvious, the second the ball left the bat, that it was a four, and the ring cheered.

"That's the game, O'Mara," came the cry from the ring. "Knock him off his length. Slam him!"

"Steady!" cautioned Clay. "Don't forget what I told you. For goodness' sake don't take risks, but keep your end up."

Clay was genuinely alarmed. In his ignorance he failed to realise that the four was

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not a fluke, but the result of perfect timing by a youngster who, whatever he lacked in the matter of practice, had a true cricketer's eye, and the speed of arm and wrist to back it up.

If Harry heard, he gave no sign. He did not mean to "keep his end up"; he meant to hit Biggar, if such a thing were possible, and hit him hard. At the other end of the pitch, Biggar fumed. To have one of his very best balls treated in such cavalier fashion was far from pleasing. Somehow, he hated O'Mara and meant—well, the next ball would show.

His run to the wicket was followed by his body coiling like a spring, a sudden snapping straight as his arm whirled round, and the ball whizzed down to the wicket. It was pitched a bit short, a ball that is the terror of timid batsmen, a ball rising as high as the head, and shooting dangerously.

Harry could have been forgiven if he had merely ducked for safety, but that did not appeal to him. His fighting blood was up. That ball had to be hit, and there was only one way to hit it. Without realising what he was doing, he dropped on to one knee and

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struck upward fiercely, as the ball rose and hurtled towards him.

“Crack!” The rising bat hit the under side of the ball, lifting it clean over the head of the wicket-keeper, lifting it so high it seemed as though it would never come down again. Away on the boundary, Phillips began to run, took a dozen hasty strides, and then halted. He knew the futility of his action. Craning necks round the boundary enabled eyes to follow the flight of the ball, bent right back as it passed overhead, and twisted round to mark where it dropped.

There was no doubt as to the hit being a six. That was not the point. The school wanted to mark the spot where the ball fell, so that they could later talk of that mighty hit.

“Fifty, sixty, seventy yards beyond the boundary, and the ball came thudding down to the accompaniment of cheers, as the ring rose and acclaimed O’Mara’s effort.

“Well hit, O’Mara,” cried Raikes. “Oh, well hit, sir!”

But Harry was deaf alike to praise or blame. Already he was anxious for the next ball, the last of the over, so that he could further impress Biggar with the knowledge that, no

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matter what happened with the rest of the school, no O'Mara was to be frightened out.

"Swish." Once more he lashed out, as Biggar sped the ball towards him, and from the ring came a whistle. Harry was a split second too late with his stroke, and the ball grazed the wicket, so narrowly, a thicker coat of varnish must almost have meant disaster.

"Nearly got you that time," grunted Biggar. "If I had another ball I'd finish you off. Don't let Clay score, Scott," he said to his colleague; "I want to get O'Mara in the next over."

"Anyone would think you had a personal spite against the youngster," was Scott's surprised comment, as he regarded Biggar with questioning eyes. "That's not the spirit for cricket, Biggar. He may have hit you, but you've got to admit he's got pluck." Generous in all his instincts, Scott could not but feel that there was something in Biggar's attitude that repelled him.

Four balls later, and the match was over. The first three deliveries Scott sent down to Clay were carefully blocked, and then he sent down a ball that was just a shade loose. With a glad cry, Clay hit it, and then threw

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down his bat and executed a war-dance as the crimson rambler lived up to its nickname, and sped to the boundary. In his tempestuous joy he darted down the crease and, clutching O'Mara, dragged him into a miniature Apache dance.

"Stop it," cried Harry. "Stop it, you madman. It's not dignified."

"Dignified be bothered!" yelled Clay. "Who cares a rap about dignity. We've licked 'em, that's enough. I'm dashed if I don't take the whole team out for a special celebration feed to-night. Licked 'em!"

"Well, O'Mara, how did you like it? Going to give it another trial?" Raikes put the question as the players left the field.

"Not in a match," grinned Harry. "But I am going to practise at the nets a lot. I believe I can learn to play the game, and I mean to have a shot at it."

"That's the spirit," commented the school captain. "I'll come down and help you all I can. I wish the others in the school would do the same as you. They are too fond of scratch matches, and don't do half enough work at the nets to become real cricketers."

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CHAPTER XV.

THE FIGHT IN THE GYM.

“ Oh, you brute. Stop it ! O-oh ! ”

O'Mara heard the cry of a junior, in obvious pain, and ran along the corridor to see what was happening. It was a week after the famous cricket match, a week to Harry of hard practice at the nets, and progress that had delighted the heart of Raikes, and the boy was feeling surprisingly pleased with himself. No longer did he regard cricket as a dangerous, undignified game. It had caught him completely now that he had tasted the delight of bat meeting ball in a full-blooded drive. He was on his way to the nets when he heard the cry of the junior. Running lightly along the corridor, he turned a corner, to come upon Biggar Major, and another—little Whibley. There was no mistaking what

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was happening. Biggar was twisting the fag's arm in a cruel manner.

"Stop that!" cried Harry, his anger rising at the spectacle. With a bound he reached the two figures, and caught Biggar's shoulder in a firm grip. "Stop it!"

"Better mind your own business," grunted Biggar, savagely, "unless you want a taste of the same thing."

With a rapid action he flung Whibley from him and lashed out with a right fist, designed to smash O'Mara to the ground, all his hatred flaming into the blow. He got a surprise, for the blow was parried with ease, and an open hand struck him lightly across the face. If Biggar had been a wise person, he would have been warned by that simple action that O'Mara had undergone a considerable change since the last occasion on which they clashed, that he was no longer lacking ability to box. Biggar was not wise; he was angry, and no angry person is ever wise. With a roar he charged, and there was every prospect of a very undignified scramble, when Raikes appeared on the scene.

"That'll do, Biggar," rapped the captain.
"That'll——"

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“ Oh, run away and play,” roared Biggar, flinging discretion to the winds in his rage. “ Think I’m going to let O’Mara come butting in, just when he pleases, and not kick ? I’m going to give him a lesson, and I don’t care if you *are* the captain of the school. For two pins I’d punch your head as well, or have a jolly good try. You think, because you are captain of the school, that you can order fellows about just as you like. I’m sick of it, for one, and this time, well, you can jolly well mind your own business. I’m going to give O’Mara a hiding, no matter what you say.”

“ You—— ” began a surprised Raikes ; but O’Mara cut him short.

“ Let me settle this affair,” said Harry, in level tones. “ For some time now, Biggar has been waiting for an opportunity to have a cut at me, has been going round trying to force a quarrel upon me, until I’m tired of it all, and feel inclined to make an end. There couldn’t be a better time than the present, so, with your permission, we’ll get it over. There is bound to be a clash sooner or later, and if we don’t settle it to-day, it only means that it is postponed.”

“ Settle it ! I’ll—— ” roared Biggar ; but

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Raikes cut him short with a snappy command.

“What precisely do you mean, O’Mara?” he asked.

“That Biggar and I go to the gym., with you as referee, and there put on the gloves to settle the matter. Biggar thinks he is aggrieved by something I have done. I think Biggar is a bully and a coward, who wants a lesson badly. Well, we’ll go to the gym. and fight it out.”

“But you can’t,” protested Raikes. “You are no match as a boxer for Biggar. I can’t allow it.”

“That’s right,” sneered Biggar; “look after your pet. Why don’t you put a label on him: ‘This fellow mustn’t be touched by rough boys—by order’?”

“You be quiet,” rapped Raikes, angrily, “or I’ll take you in hand. You’d just love to get O’Mara in the gym., knowing that he isn’t a match for you. It would just suit your book. I—— Why, he’d not stand the ghost of a chance with you.”

“Wait,” said O’Mara, once more taking a hand in the talk. “I’m not flattering myself that I can beat Biggar, Raikes; but I *am* flattering myself that, before he can beat me, I

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can hurt him enough to make him think very hard before he tries to tackle me again."

"But—but what's all this quarrel about?" asked Raikes, in bewildered tones.

"Oh, Biggar, as usual, was bullying a fag, when I appeared on the scene," said Harry. "I stopped him, that's all, and when he tried to hit me, I slapped his face."

"But I can't allow——"

"You can, and you've got to do," said Harry, in steady tones. "Look here, Raikes, I'm going into this thing deliberately, and with my eyes open. I expect I shall get a hiding, but before that happens I shall have hurt Biggar, and made him chary for the future. I don't want to go against your authority, but—well, I'm going through with this now, always presuming that Biggar is willing."

"Willing, you cheeky young bounder," roared Biggar. "I'll come gladly, and give you the biggest hiding of your life. Raikes saved you once before; but once I get you in the ring, with the gloves on, he won't be able to save you again."

"That's as may be," grinned Harry, as he turned and led the way towards the gym. Raikes followed, his head in a whirl. For

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the moment he imagined that O'Mara had taken complete leave of his senses. In the excitement, little Whibley was forgotten. None of the three noticed him as, his eyes alight with excitement, he ran off, to carry the news of the impending fight to the rest of the school. The boys were all down at the cricket field, and he burst upon them like a miniature cyclone.

"I say, you fellows, come on to the gym., quick!" he gasped, without preamble; "Biggar Major and O'Mara are having a fight."

"What! Who says so?"

"I do, and Raikes has gone along to act as referee. Come on."

"Why, Biggar'll eat him," came the unbelieving protest.

"Might do," panted Whibley, as he started to run towards the gym. "You fellows can please yourselves; I'm not going to miss that fight for anything."

Nor, apparently, were the rest of the boys. In a flash, news of the impending battle passed round the cricket field; in less than half-a-minute not a boy but was speeding as fast as his legs would carry him in the direction of the gym. Like a flood they burst into

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the building. Half refused to believe the news; but they realised that Whibley was not romancing the moment they got inside the gym., for O'Mara and Biggar were already dressed for the ring, and were donning gloves under the superintendence of Raikes and Scott.

"You kids keep clear and keep quiet," Raikes shouted, to make himself heard over the sudden noise. "If you want to watch, you must be quiet, otherwise I shall send you all out."

Under the threats, plus the knowledge that Raikes would not hesitate to carry it out, the youngsters became silent.

"One of you—you, Clay—trot off and bring Sergeant Benson," added the captain, naming the school physical-training instructor. "Tell him I want him to act as referee for this affair. Scott, you second Biggar, and I'll look after O'Mara. Any limit to the rounds, you two?"

"Not needed," sneered Biggar. "There won't be more than one."

"No limit, please," said O'Mara. "We'll go on until one cries enough."

"As you like, O'Mara," said Raikes, in

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level tones. "But I think you are mad."

Such, judging from the whispered comments, was also the opinion of the rest of the school. Biggar, rightly, was recognised as the best light-weight boxer at Whitegate, and added to that was the fact that he was the taller and physically the bigger of the pair. The general view was that the fight could have only one end, the defeat of O'Mara, and a speedy defeat at that.

Sergeant Benson gave a whistle of surprise as he saw the principals in the fight ; but he did not delay in starting the bout.

"Queensberry rules, with two-minute rounds," he said. "Morden, hold the watch. Now, gentlemen, if you are ready."

"Time," called Morden, and promptly there started a fight that is talked about to this day at Whitegate, a fight that became a classic when boys wished to speak of examples of pluck.

Remembering the ease with which he had once hit O'Mara, Biggar started off with a rush. What he had once done, he could do again, he reasoned.

"Better not finish it off too quickly," he told himself. "If I do, O'Mara will

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escape too lightly. I'll just hammer him hard for a few rounds, and then finish him off."

Such was his intention. Precisely one minute later he was revising his views. To his surprise, he discovered that O'Mara could box more than a little, and that his expected superiority was far from being as pronounced as he had imagined. A snappy left hand that jolted his head back uncomfortably to stop one of his rushes, conveyed the news, and the way O'Mara stepped inside his arms, to minimise the intended effect of vicious swings, confirmed what the left hand had written.

"My word, no wonder the kid was ready to fight," said Raikes to himself; "he's learned to box. I fancy Biggar is going to find it a good deal harder to win than he imagined would be the case. No, by Jove, he isn't, though, if he can land with many punches like that."

Biggar, realising that he was going to need all his skill, had forced himself to caution. He had stopped his rushes, and was boxing as cleverly as he knew how to do. Taking O'Mara's blows on a perfect guard, he began

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to faint, and at last got his reward when Harry dropped his guard.

“Bang!” O’Mara’s head went back, as a heavy right crashed into his face and beat him down on to one knee. In a trice he was up again, only to meet a second blow, before he could fling his hands up. Down he went once again, and boys in the gym. started to acclaim Biggar as the victor.

“Take a count, O’Mara,” Raikes in his excitement spoke aloud; but if Harry heard he took no notice. The second blow that had sent him down had made his head sing, for a moment his wits were scattered; but the spirit of the O’Maras brought him to his feet, anxious to fight back. Instinctively, he lashed out, as he sprang to his feet, and his right fist knocked Biggar backward, but only for a moment. The bigger boy was strong; so far he had been unhurt. Disregarding the blows that were aimed at him, he bore in again, right and left fists snapping out from the shoulder, to land with thudding impacts on O’Mara’s head. Harry’s legs bent under him before that tornado of blows, until an extra hard right crashed home against his jaw, and for the third time he went down.

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“ One—two—— ” Benson began to count.

“ Time ! ” from Morden came the signal for the end of the round, and Raikes sprang into the ring to lift Harry and half-carry him to his corner.

“ Better chuck it, O’Mara,” he said ; “ you are no match for him.”

“ I’m all right yet,” grinned Harry, as his head cleared. “ I’m a long way from being beaten. I made the mistake of not stopping down for a short count the first time he hit me. I’ll not get up as quickly next time. But, whatever happens, Raikes, no one must stop the fight ; I’ll never forgive you if you allow that.”

It was as well that Raikes had been given the warning, for he was strongly tempted to intervene in the next round.

Harry was down twice near the end of the round, but he was on his feet and fighting back when Morden called time once again. Raikes was tempted again in the next round, when Biggar, crowding on speed, drove O’Mara before him round the ring. Harry spent a great deal of that round on the boards, and Raikes groaned. It was not for him to know that Harry had a song in his heart. To all

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intents he was well beaten at that stage, hopelessly outclassed, but he alone, of all in the building, knew better. Already Biggar's blows were landing with just a shade less force. True, they were landing with enough weight to knock him down, but no longer did they possess the crippling, stunning effect that they had had in the first round. Biggar was beginning to tire slightly from the violence of his own efforts. That was what Harry was playing for. He knew that, in the matter of skill, he could not match Biggar. His only hope was to remain in the ring long enough to outlast his opponent.

"Better throw in the sponge," said Raikes, once again, after the sixth round. "He's beating you hollow. He landed two blows to one that time."

"And in the round before he landed three to one," said Harry, contorting his bruised features into a caricature of a grin. "By the time we reach the tenth round, he'll not land more than one for one, and then——"

"Then what?"

"Then I'll beat him." Harry's jaws snapped as he uttered the words. Over in his corner, Biggar was pluming himself on the

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fact that he was giving his opponent a lesson.

"He can't stick it much longer," he said to Scott. "After what he's gone through, he's bound to crack before long."

He might have revised his opinion had he been able to read O'Mara's thoughts, or known more of what a fighting spirit really meant. He expected O'Mara to admit defeat, because never before had he faced anyone who did not include that word in his personal dictionary. Only one thing would ever make an O'Mara admit defeat, and that was sheer inability to stand up.

"Here goes to finish him," said Biggar, as the gong went for the seventh round. "Watch me this time, Scott; I'll show you what boxing really is."

Biggar was as good as his word. Moving lightly on his feet, he waded in, landing lefts and rights, jabbing, stabbing, rocking O'Mara back on to his heels; but ever O'Mara came back for more. For one minute Biggar gave his opponent a scientific thrashing, and at the end of the minute, Biggar, for the first time since the fight opened, had his first twinge of fear. By all his reckoning, O'Mara should have been beaten into defeat; yet, not only

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was he still on his feet, but was fighting back. For the first time, doubts assailed Biggar. Any ordinary boy would have been beaten a dozen times over, yet—would O'Mara never go down for good? His own arms were growing weary. To hit was becoming an effort. He would ease up a little, to rest his muscles, and then have another try.

Biggar did ease up. He dropped his hand for a second, and with heaving chest regarded O'Mara as he would have regarded a freak. Then something hit him violently in the body, knocking him backward for a step. He moved his hands to guard against any repetition of the blow, and something hit him in the face. In sheer desperation he started to box again, forcing his tired muscles to their office, for those two blows had hurt, when Morden signalled the end of the round.

"Not finished yet?" Scott ventured the observation, as Biggar returned to his corner for the minute rest.

"No; I—look here, Scott," panted Biggar, in reply, "I can't make him out at all. He ought to have been beaten several times, yet he comes up fresh every round. Time after time I thought I'd got him, and then I've

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found I'd got to start all over again. I almost think he isn't human. Look at him there, in his corner. You'd think he was absolutely at his last gasp, yet I know he'll be ready when Morden calls the round. I tried to finish him the last round, as I never tried before, and——" Biggar fell back into an expressive silence as he looked across to O'Mara's corner, and saw Harry's face wreathed in a happy smile, in spite of its many bruises. That was the most singular part of the whole affair.

Biggar was not marked in any way, while Harry's face bore unmistakable traces of the battle ; yet few in the room doubted the issue. Both boys were distressed, yet while Biggar's face had gradually become more and more anxious, O'Mara had grown more and more cheerful, in spite of the constant hammering. He had played his game. He had taken all the punishment Biggar could hand out, with Spartan fortitude, reserving his strength until such time as Biggar grew tired, and that time had now come.

"Time!" Morden's call brought the boys to their feet again. It was at once evident that Biggar meant to spar for time.

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He no longer attacked, but fell back in a defensive attitude, and waited. He had not long to wait.

"Now is when you get hurt," grinned Harry, as he went in to attack. A straight left met him on the cheek-bone, but he merely laughed and brushed the fist aside as he strode forward. His advance was relentless, a steady moving forward to within striking distance and, do what he would, Biggar could not keep him at bay.

"This is where I teach you your lesson," hissed Harry, as he got to close quarters. "I may not beat you, but I fancy you will think twice in the future before you start your bullying tactics when I'm about. Hurt you, did it?" as Biggar winced before a full-blooded blow that landed on his body. "Bah, fight, Biggar, fight. You were ready to fight a round back, so fight now."

Boys at Whitegate never forgot that last round. O'Mara seemed suddenly to go mad. Without warning, he tore loose, in dramatic fashion, arms working like piston rods. Biggar met him with all the craft he could summon to his aid; but craft did not avail. He tried to back before those relentless fists, that were

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never still, and found himself up against the ropes and in a corner. In sheer desperation he fought back, but the strength had gone from his blows. O'Mara laughed out loud as Biggar's right fist landed on his neck; laughed, and lashed out with all his strength. He knew he was shooting his last bolt. His energies were flagging, his knees threatened to crumple up under him, but with a supreme effort of will, he called up his last reserve of strength in a whirlwind of blows, most of them none too well directed, but all blows that hurt tremendously.

"O'Mara wins." In their excitement the spectators began to shout. That tremendous rally had roused him as nothing had ever done before. "O'Mara wins. See, Biggar is going down. Biggar—is down!"

It was true. No boy could stand up for long before such a tornado of blows. Biggar's legs crumpled under him, and he sank in a collapsed heap to the boards.

"Beaten him!" O'Mara laughed out loud, and waved his arm as he staggered back towards his corner. The fight was over and already the reaction had set in. After the punishment he had taken, followed by that

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one last tremendous effort, Harry felt physically sick. The ring was reeling round him as he crossed it, to sink into his corner and collapse.

"Nine—ten." From a great distance he heard someone counting, and the count was followed by a tremendous cheer. What were the boys cheering? He tried to think. Ah, he had it. He must have won. He— With a groan he pitched forward off his stool, before Raikes could spring to his aid, and lay stretched out on the boards as helpless as a babe.

It is said that the cheer that greeted the victor, two hours later, when he presented himself on the steps leading to the quadrangle, was the greatest ever heard at Whitegate. It might have been, yet it is doubtful if it was not equalled, two months later, when the boy who was once despised by the school, pulled the game with Menton out of the fire by a masterly innings. One thing, however, is certain. Harry's joy was no greater than the joy of his father after the match, when he playfully suggested that the boy might find a little excitement during the evening over a game of chess.

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“Chess!” Harry’s voice was full of contempt. “I’ve no time for it. It might be all right for old men, but not for me. Besides, I’m due to take a boxing lesson from Biggar. My word, dad, you should see him box. Cleverest fellow in the school with his hands, and he’s teaching me all he knows. Fine fellow, Biggar. We didn’t quite hit it at first, but we get on quite well these days.”

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CHAPTER XVI.

A CURE FOR CONCEIT.

“Come in !”

Raikes uttered the call as he sat in his study, as usual, with Scott as his companion. There had been a knock on the door, a rather timid knock, and the captain jumped to the conclusion that some junior wished to speak to him. He was much surprised as the door opened and O'Mara walked into the room.

“Hello, youngster !” cried Raikes, cheerily, “come in. I thought you were still busy showing your pater round the school.”

“No,” smiled O'Mara, in reply ; “that's not at all necessary ; believe me, the pater knows a great deal more about the school than I do. He and Trueman started talking about the days they spent together here, and

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I have come to the conclusion that dad and Trueman must have been the despair of masters who tried to keep the school in order, always breaking bounds and that kind of thing."

"I believe you are right there!" laughed Raikes; "from little things that Trueman allows to slip every now and then, when he starts talking about the old days, I gather that he and your pater were rather harum-scarum youngsters, but they settled down. Fine men, both; I only hope—— But what brings you here?"

"An idea of the pater's, and, incidentally, one that I'm backing for all I'm worth. He's asked me to invite several of the boys to spend part of the long vac. with us, down at our place in Sussex, and if you will, I should like you and Scott to make two of the party. We can promise you a lot of fun. Dad's grounds run right down to the sea, and, apart from the fun there, dad's intention is to organise a cricket match with the village. You know, press the grooms and the gardeners into service. With four boys from the school we can just make up an eleven."

"Delighted, I'm sure!" cried Raikes,

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enthusiastically. "What say you, Adam?"

"Rather!" There was no mistaking Scott's delight at the prospect; "I'll come like a shot. Who's the third boy you are asking, O'Mara?"

"Well, unless you two object, I was thinking of asking Biggar," replied the boy, in tones expressive of his doubt as to how the news would be received. "I know——"

"That's all right," cut in Raikes; "Biggar is a bit difficult to get on with, and I, for one, shall welcome the chance to get on more intimate terms with him. He's been a good deal more human ever since your little affair with the gloves, and at the rate he's going, I can see him running strongly for the cricket captaincy when I leave next year. My recommendation will carry a great deal of weight, and after the lesson he has had, I believe he'll make a good captain."

"Then that's settled!" cried Harry, joyfully; "I'll toddle off and see Biggar. As to date, how would a month from to-day suit you? That will give you a fortnight at home."

"Suits me," said Raikes, while Scott nodded his acceptance of the date.

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Five minutes later, O'Mara was chuckling to himself, having pressed Biggar into an acceptance of the invitation.

* * * *

"Well, boys, what is it to be? Do we ride, fish, or take the yacht out?"

O'Mara put the question a week after the boys had arrived at Warren Lodge. For a couple of days Raikes and company had found themselves rather restrained and bashful, but Colonel O'Mara had quickly put them at their ease, and now they were enjoying life with a healthy abandon.

For the rest of the morning the four chums enjoyed themselves riding The Imp. The animal was in his most skittish mood, but all four took frequent tosses with happy grins. It was O'Mara who at last called a halt.

"Time to be off for lunch," he said; "after that, we shall have to get ready for the match with the village."

"What sort of a team have they got?" asked Biggar; "more especially, what sort of bowlers have they?"

"Don't know," replied O'Mara; "I believe the village grocer is their star. Fast, but erratic."

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“ Good ! ” grinned Biggar ; “ sounds the type of bowler who ought to provide us with quite a lot of runs ; what do you say, Raikes ? ”

“ I’m not forgetting that on one occasion a village blacksmith bowled W. G. Grace with his first ball in a local match. You never know what will happen at cricket—it’s a funny game. Still, we ought to lead our opponents quite a lot.”

All the village was there to watch the match, and they cheered the “ house ” heartily when an hour saw the village team put out for 65 runs.

“ Now we’ll show them what real batting is,” smiled Biggar, as he put on his pads and prepared to go out with Raikes to open the “ house ” innings. “ Trot out your village grocer, Harry, and let me smite him out of the county ! ”

“ He’s already out there,” grinned O’Mara, pointing to a stocky individual who stood by the wicket, “ waiting to take your scalp.”

“ I’ll give him scalp,” laughed Biggar ; “ let me take first knock, Raikes.”

Nodding agreement, Raikes led the way to the crease.

“ Play ! ”

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“ Takes a short run for a fast bowler,” said Biggar, to himself ; “ now—— Great Scot ! What was that ? ”

His surprise was justified. Expecting a fast ball, he was taken unawares by a slow one, akin to O'Mara's best donkey drop, and before he could get over his surprise, it was too late to slam the ball over the boundary. He grinned as he gripped his bat and prepared for the next ball. Another like that, and——

“ I'll hit the next one,” he grunted, and he tried to carry out his threat. But the ball, different in every way from the one that had preceded it, seemed to curl underneath his bat as he made his stroke, and an ominous click from behind as the ball passed told him that his wicket had been hit.

He looked from the broken wicket to the bowler and back again in unbelief.

“ You're out ! ” The wicket keeper showed an almost unholy glee in making the announcement, and it was as much as Biggar could do to keep back a sharp answer ; but he did it.

“ I know,” he said, “ but how—— ? ”

Evidently he gave it up, as with a doleful shake of the head that sent the spectators off

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into a fresh outburst of laughter, he walked away from the wicket.

"What's the matter with the stuff? It looked easy enough from the boundary." O'Mara put the question plus the observation, as he met Biggar half-way from the wicket.

"That's just it," grunted Biggar, disgustedly; "it is easy, and I ought to have slammed that stuff all over the place, but—well—I suppose I was caught in two minds. Now I suppose you fellows will hit the grocer into the next county and make me feel mad with myself."

"I'm going to try," grinned Harry. He did; tried it with the first ball sent down and had the joy of lifting it clean over the boundary for a six. He tried to repeat the stroke with the next delivery, but something seemed to go wrong with the flight of the ball, and he missed, to hear the click as ball struck wicket again. O'Mara joined the disgust of Biggar as he walked back, while the crowd rocked with laughter.

The groom, the next man in, ran out jauntily, gave one terrific swipe at the first ball he got, and promptly started to walk back to the seats of the fallen.

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There is no need to go into detail in recording that amazing innings. Raikes got twenty off his first over, and then the amazing grocer took up the attack again from the other end, did the hat trick, after the first ball had been hit for four, saw his fifth ball swept out of the ground, and found compensation in still another wicket.

Raikes set himself to hit, collected nineteen off the over from the other end, and was left facing the grocer. He might have made that nineteen into twenty, but preferred not to run the even figure. He wanted to sample the grocer. He did. Colonel O'Mara at the other end helped himself to two boundaries, and Raikes was called to action again. He hit where he fondly imagined the ball was going to be, found nothing more substantial than air, and went to join the fallen. That same over saw the end of the match, and the village had won by six runs.

Away trooped the players to the tent for refreshment. O'Mara and his chums were very puzzled, but Colonel O'Mara chuckled happily to himself.

"Well, boys," said the veteran V.C., how did you like it? What do you think

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of the bowler the village sprang upon us. Here, come and let me introduce you to him."

Four boys followed the colonel across the grass, four very puzzled boys, be it said. Each had a suspicion that there was a joke hidden somewhere. The grocer sat thoughtfully sipping a glass of lemonade.

"Harry, meet Jimmy Poole," said the colonel, with a wink, as he halted before the grocer.

"Meet—Poole, did you say, father ; Jimmy Poole ? "

"Yes, my boy, Jimmy Poole."

"Not—— Surely, dad, not *the* Jimmy Poole ? "

"Yes, my boy. Jimmy Poole, the most famous googlie bowler Australia ever produced, the man who tumbled out our test team at Sydney. Ha, ha, ha ! Jimmy, the joke worked ! Oh, you boys ! Ha, ha, ha ! "

"Jimmy Poole," said Biggar, in an awed whisper ; "and to think I said his stuff ought to be slammed into the next county ! Oh, my hat ! Me trying to hit six off Jimmy Poole ! It's too funny for words ! "

Biggar sank back weakly, overcome by his

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mirth, and the three chums joined him in a flood of merry laughter.

“What’s the idea, dad?” said O’Mara.

“To take you youngsters down a bit,” frankly confessed the colonel; “you seemed to have the idea that you were all finished players. I just thought I’d show you how much you have to learn yet. Poole’s father and I were old chums, so I asked Jimmy—who happened to be in England on holiday—to come down and try and teach you something, but, first of all, to turn out for the village team without you knowing who he was. Jimmy, out of friendship, has promised to give you lads a few days’ coaching, and by the end of that time perhaps you will know nearly as much about cricket as you thought you did. I don’t know what you boys feel like, but I know Harry was in danger of getting conceited——”

“And took the surest means of curing the attack,” cut in Harry. “I imagined I was quite a great cricketer, but this afternoon has taught me that I have still got a lot to learn, and a lot of hard work to do, before I am in the least likely to play for England.”

